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IT'S ALPACA...**

**AND OTHER ANIMAL  
PITCH INVASIONS**

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**GOING BUMP IN THE NIGHT** SPOOKY SOUNDS OF EAST HADDAM

**FULL MOON MADNESS** THE SCIENCE OF LUNAR INFLUENCES

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STRANGE PHENOMENA

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# ForteanTimes

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## HELL CATS

**FEAR OF FELINES AND  
THE DEMONISATION OF  
THE DOMESTIC CAT**

### THE AINTREE SPECTRES

**MYSTERIOUS  
ROBED CULTISTS  
HAUNTING  
MERSEYSIDE**

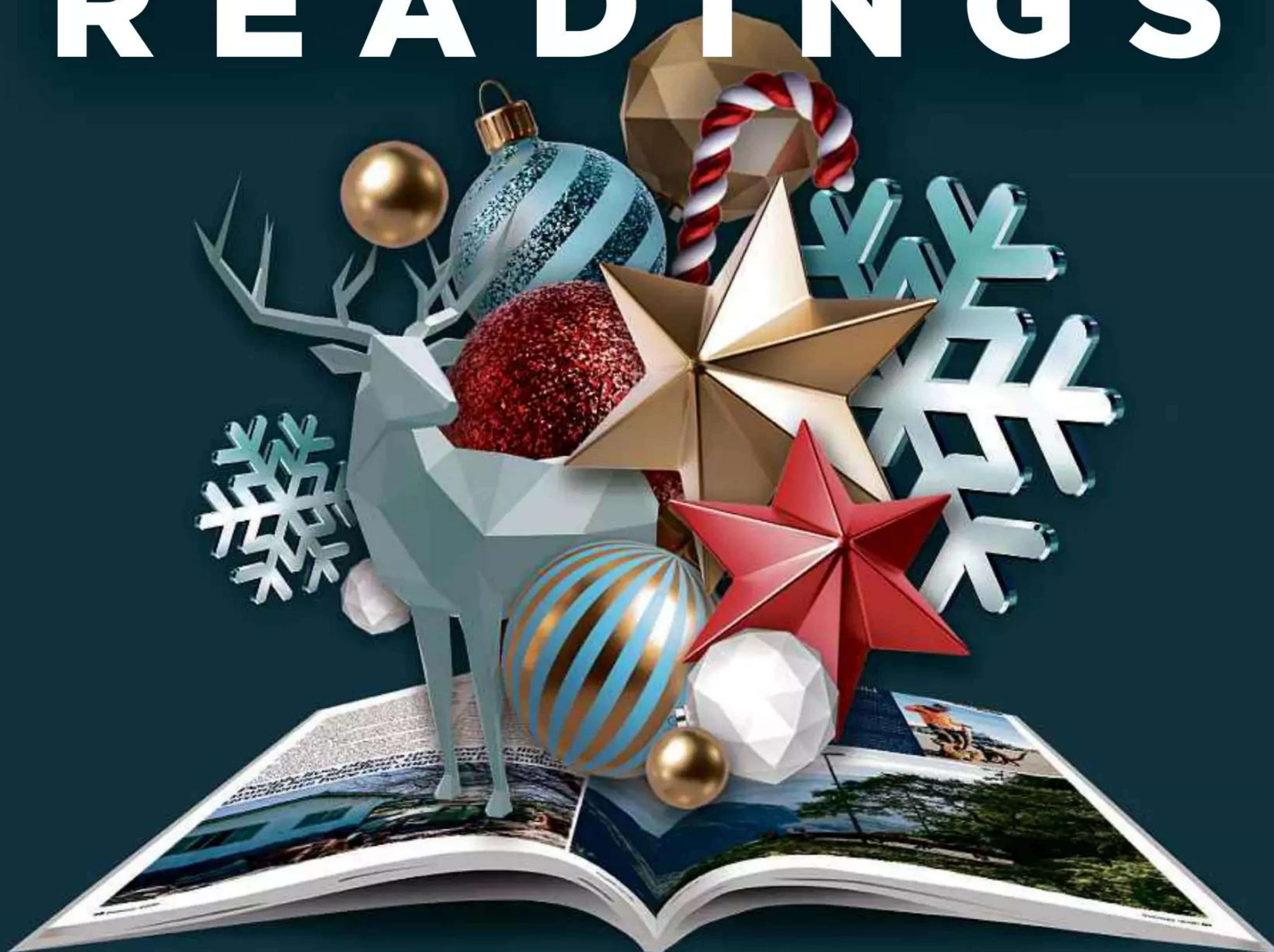
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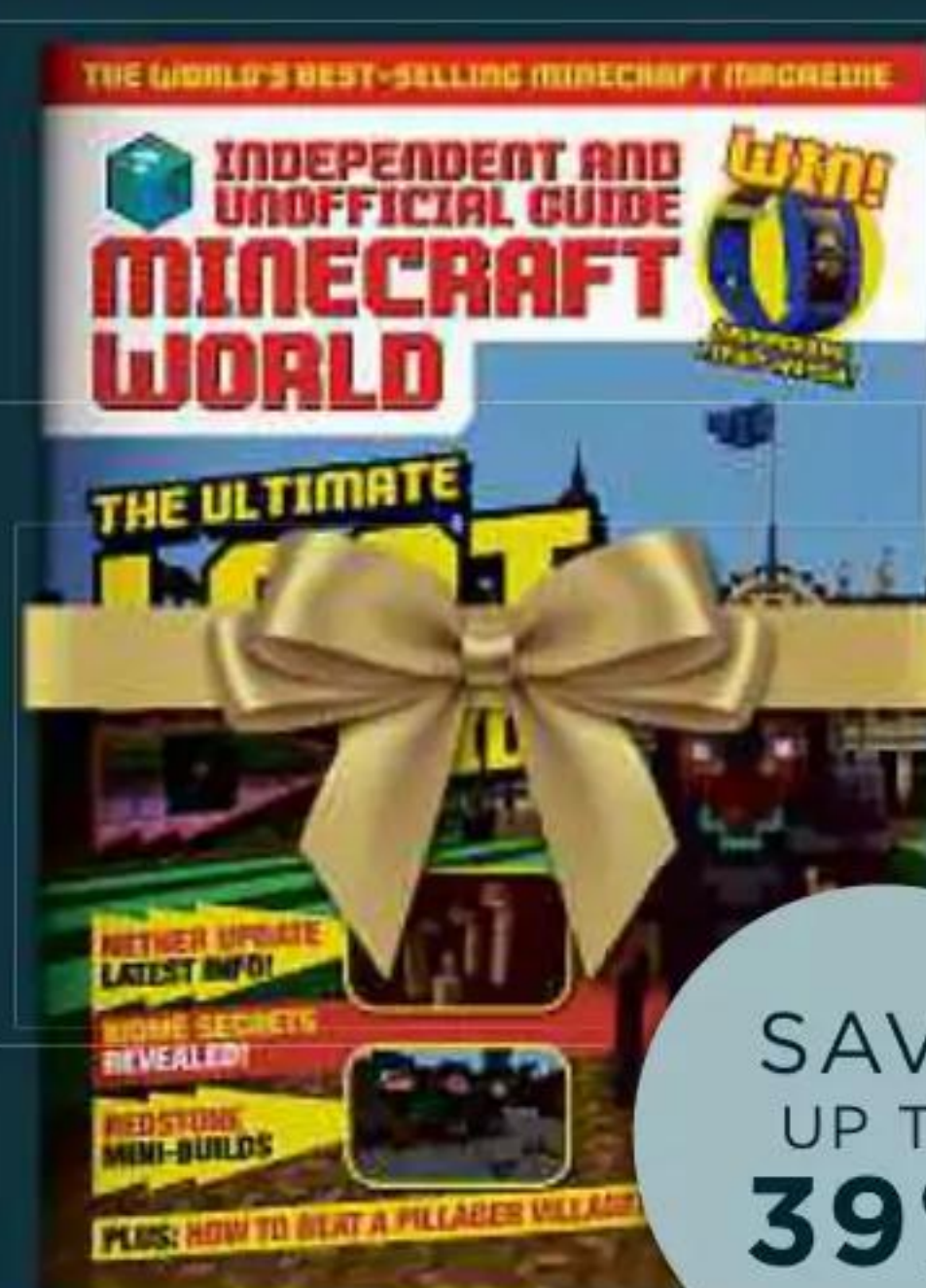
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PAUL KOUDOUNARIS



30 The demonisation of the domestic cat

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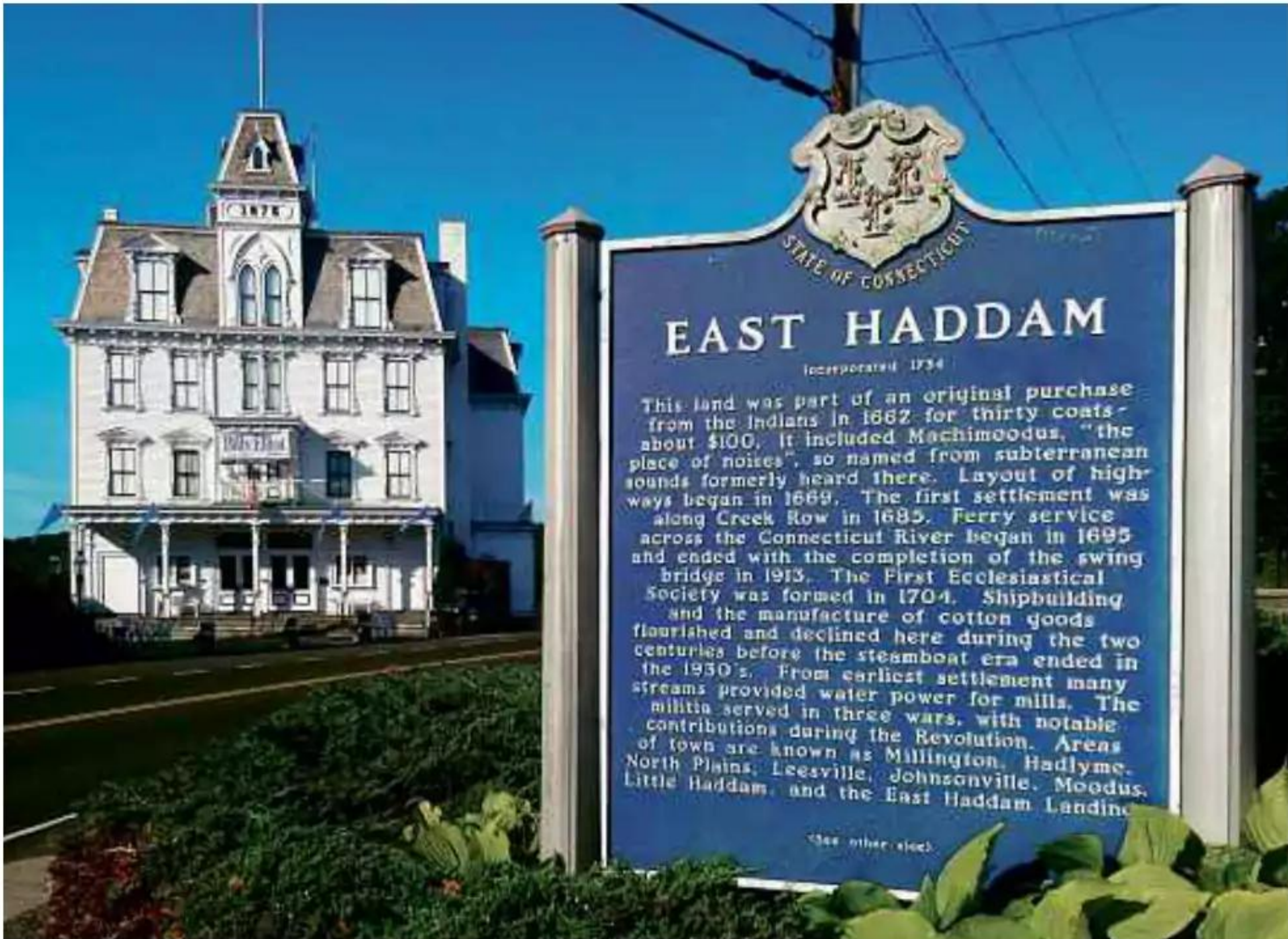
20 Animal pitch invasions

JANEK SKARZYNSKI / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



9 Pope versus meteorite, part 2

SHARON A HILL



74 Things that go bump in the night: East Haddam, Connecticut

COVER IMAGE: BABA BY PAUL KOUDOUNARIS  
CAT'S PAW INSERT BY LILIYA GREK ON UNSPLASH



**FORTEAN TIMES 399**  
Why fortean?  
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!  
SEE PAGE **78**

## STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: Russian 'Jesus' arrested, alpaca on the pitch, mystery spy boat and much more...

- |    |             |    |                   |
|----|-------------|----|-------------------|
| 12 | ARCHAEOLOGY | 23 | MYTHCONCEPTIONS   |
| 14 | SCIENCE     | 24 | CONSPIRASPHERE    |
| 16 | GHOSTWATCH  | 26 | STRANGE CONTINENT |

## FEATURES

### 30 COVER STORY HELLCATS

**BABA THE CAT** (with assistance from **PAUL KOUDOUNARIS**) traces the tragic fate of her proud species as the dawn of a new religious faith saw the descendents of *Felis silvestris lybica* transformed from gods and helpers of humankind to demonic enemies of the Church.

### 38 THE AINTREE SPECTRES

There have been sightings of hooded, torch-brandishing figures in a field in Merseyside going back to World War II. But who or what are these apparitions? Robed occultists? Scouse Klansmen? A secret Evangelical society? **ROB GANDY** investigates...

### 44 DISTANT EARLY WARNINGS

As Covid-19 creates a new source of fear, **STEVE TOASE** opens his ears to the hallucinatory sounds of Emergency Population Warning Systems, uncovering a fortean history of Cold War paranoia, escaped murderers and ghostly sirens.

## SERIES

### 50 STRANGE STATESMEN

Crazy little thing called love **SD TUCKER**

### 74 FORTEAN TRAVELLER

East Haddam, Connecticut **SHARON A HILL**

## FORUM

53 The psychedelic shift **BOB FISCHER**

54 Dogmatism be damned **IAN JAMES KIDD**

## REGULARS

- |    |           |    |             |    |                |
|----|-----------|----|-------------|----|----------------|
| 02 | EDITORIAL | 67 | LETTERS     | 79 | PHENOMENOMIX   |
| 57 | REVIEWS   | 78 | READER INFO | 80 | STRANGE DEATHS |



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# EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

## A CAT'S EYE VIEW OF HISTORY



It will have long been evident to many readers that our feline overlords have been up to something, taking advantage of the chaos and confusion caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to further their cunning plans for world domination. The recent discovery of a giant cat in Peru set our alarm bells ringing. This latest gigantic geoglyph to be uncovered at Nazca in Peru – joining a menagerie of monkeys, birds and others – is nearly 2,000 years old; while Erich von Däniken has not actually said that it provides suggestive evidence for early feline-alien contact, it will certainly have crossed his mind. Paul Devereux will be bringing you a full report in his archaeology column next month.

Meanwhile, the situation closer to home has only worsened, with what appears to be an attempted coup within the editorial office of FT. You hold the terrifying result in your hands – the first issue in over 45 years with a leading article ‘written’ (ahem) by a cat (p30). Historical revisionism is very much on the agenda at present, but we wonder whether Baba’s (pictured above) retelling of history from an unashamedly feline point of view might be taking things a bit far, particularly in her focus on a shameful period in human history in which cats were subject to terrible abuse. There also appear to be signs that feline troublemakers have been deliberately disrupting sporting events around the world, and in many cases recruiting other animals, from squirrels to alpacas, to their cause; see our report on animal pitch

invasions on p20 for the full story.

Elsewhere in this issue, Steve Toase contemplates the eerie sound of the siren and its place in our contemporary landscape of paranoia (p44), Rob Gandy tries to solve a Merseyside mystery concerning recurring sightings of a group of robed and hooded figures (p38), SD Tucker salutes one of the USA’s stranger political figures (p50), and Ian James Kidd reminds us of the importance of open-mindedness, rather than dogmatism, if we want to apprehend the world in all its multifarious complexity (p54). Something for everyone, then; do pass it on to your cats.

### GETTING COPIES OF FT

You should be able to buy FT from your usual stockist. If you are experiencing difficulties, or cannot go out at the moment, then copies for home delivery, including recent issues you might have missed, can be ordered here: <https://magsdirect.co.uk/magazine-category/entertainment/fortean/>. Taking out a subscription is the best way to guarantee your regular FT fix; if you are able to support us in this way, then turn to p.56 for the latest offers.

### ERRATA

**FT396:45:** Peter Olauson writes from Gothenburg, Sweden, to inform us that Jeffrey Vallance made “one obvious error. ‘Mr Noid’s .457 Magnum’ (also mentioned on p.43) would have had an unusual calibre indeed, but the newspaper makes it clear that the gun in question was a far more common .357 Magnum.”

**FT398:60:** David Sankey’s review of the book *Mudlarking* twice gave the author’s name as ‘Laura’ instead of ‘Lara’ Maiklem; this was, he points out, down to the ‘corrections’ made by an overzealous spellechecker going unnoticed.

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# TRAD

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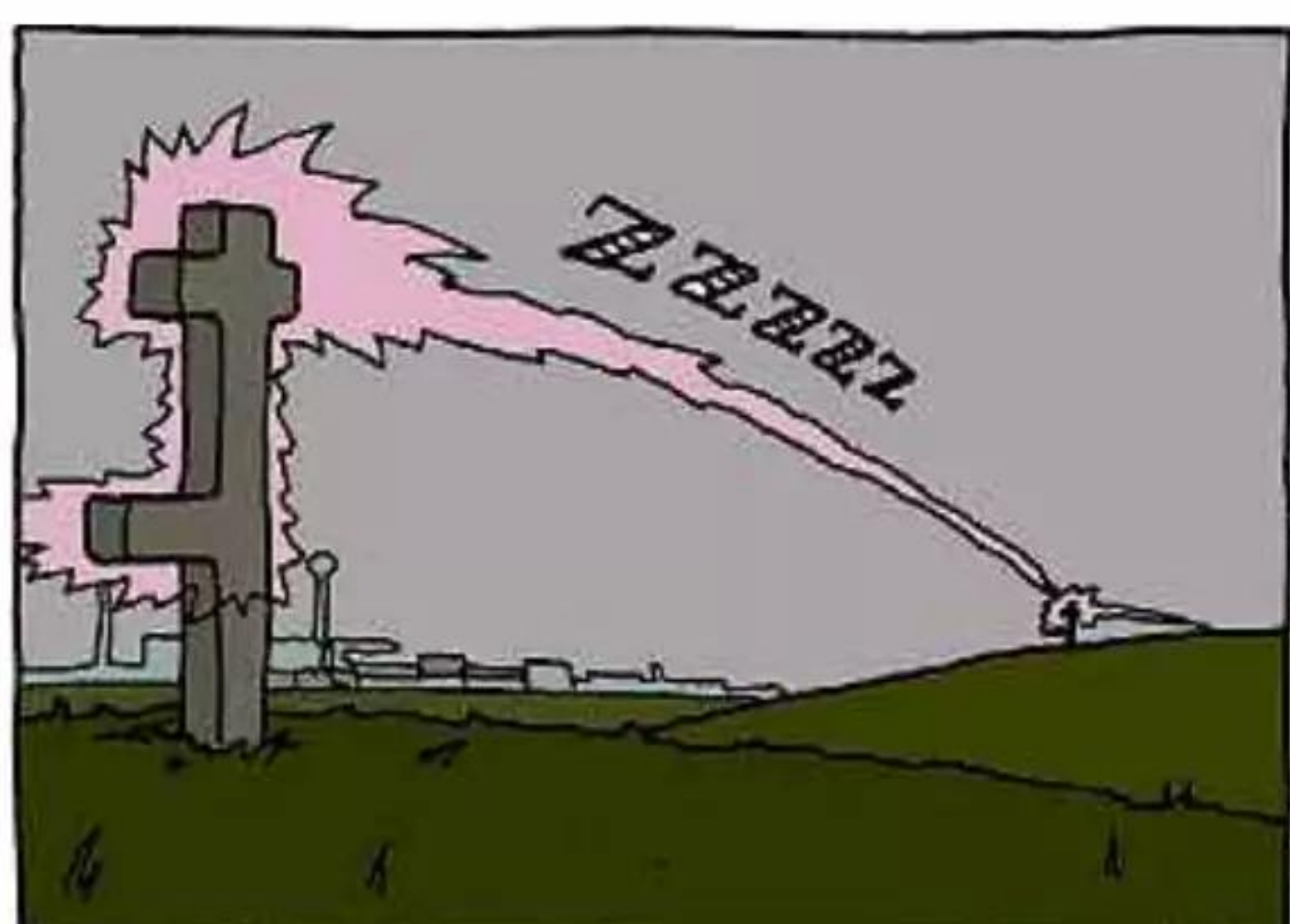
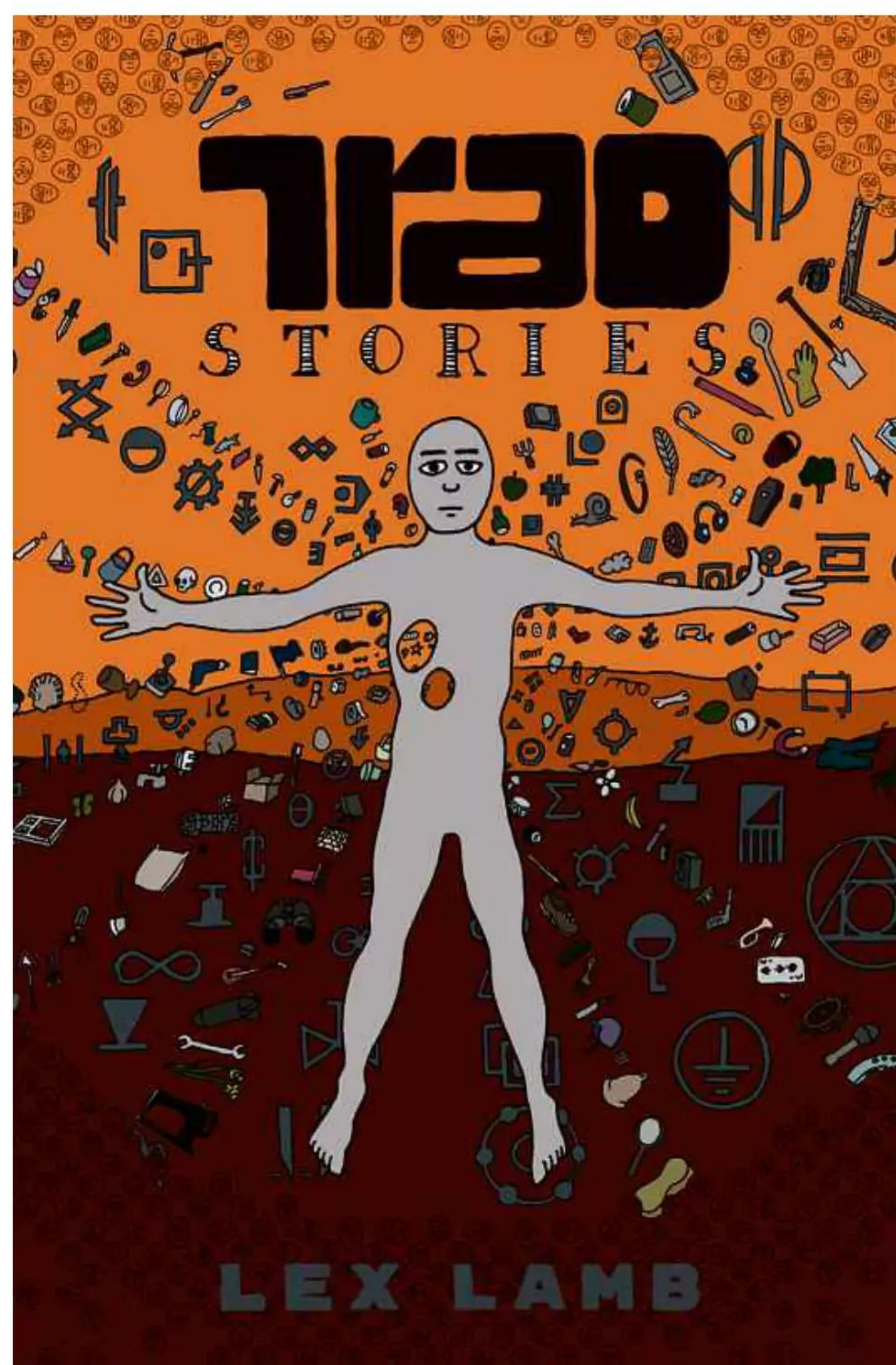
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## SCOTLAND'S SECRET SPY BOAT

**A mysterious unmanned Wave Glider washes up and remains unclaimed**

On 28 September, a small unmanned vessel was found washed up on the Scottish island of Tiree, the most westerly of the Inner Hebrides islands, about 100 miles (160km) as the crow flies from the Faslane nuclear submarine base. Following reports of an object in the water, the island's coastguard rescue team took photos of the craft and posted them to their Facebook page. Members of the public soon identified the object as an autonomous Wave Glider.

They are manufactured by US company Liquid Robotics, based in California, and are capable of travelling thousands of miles. Liquid Robotics have engaged in collaborative partnerships in the UK since 2016. In 2017, during a two-week trial at the Royal Navy's Unmanned Warrior Maritime Autonomous Systems (MAS) exercise, several Wave Gliders were successfully located and tracked an unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV) and a manned diesel-electric submarine.

A similar device was spotted early this year by a sport fisherman off the coast of Florida. It was identified it as a modified Wave Glider designed for a US Navy sub-hunting programme, the Sensor Hosting Autonomous Remote Craft (SHARC). Wave Gliders are employed by other government agencies, as well as the Royal and US Navies.

To date, the Tiree coast guard have been unable to trace the owner of the damaged vessel, whose configuration suggests it was on a secret mission. "The vessel is not ours," said a



ABOVE: The damaged Wave Glider that washed up on Tiree on 28 September.

Ministry of Defence spokesman. Asked if one of their craft was missing, the US Navy responded: "I will have to refer you to the Royal Navy for this query." But the Royal Navy maintains the craft is nothing to do with them: "No updates. Position still

stands." Liquid Robotics also responded to enquiries: "We have had several reach-outs over the washed up platform and have engaged the end user to make them aware of this find. I believe they are in the process of reaching out to local authorities

with further instructions on the disposal." This confirms the craft is a Liquid Robotics Wave Glider and not a clone.

It's possible that the craft has a scientific research purpose rather than a military one, but its unusual configuration of antennae suggests not. Additionally, its grey colour (rather than the usual bright yellow with a pennant, which makes it easier to see) indicates military or espionage usage. It has no navigation lights (compulsory in UK law for any vessel sailing at night) or a radar reflector. Without these it would be very difficult to spot; and here there may be an explanation of how it came to be washed up with a broken antenna. Was there a collision at sea?

In September 2019, a similar vessel was washed up on a Northern Irish beach less than 100 miles (160km) away. It was in far worse condition but was similar to the Tiree craft in that it was grey. It has remained unclaimed, which suggests its owners do not wish to be known.

What has been established is that the washed-up vessel does not belong to the Royal Navy, but was operating in UK waters and was trying to remain undetected in an area of strategic significance, as was the craft found in Northern Ireland last year. Was the Tiree vessel being controlled by a US agency or another power? As FT's David Hambling wrote in an article for *Forbes*: "[T]he mystery remains over who was operating it, what it was doing – and why they are keeping quiet." [maritime-executive.com, 4 Oct; www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2020/10/07/mystery-deepens-around-unmanned-spy-boat-washed-up-in-scotland/](https://www.maritime-executive.com/story/4-Oct-2020/www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2020/10/07/mystery-deepens-around-unmanned-spy-boat-washed-up-in-scotland/).





## BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON

Exploring the science of lunar influence

PAGE 14



## A BUM DEAL FOR GHOSTS

Phantom faces and spirit voices scrutinised

PAGE 16



## PICK UP A PENGUIN?

A strange visitor to a rooftop in Germany

PAGE 27

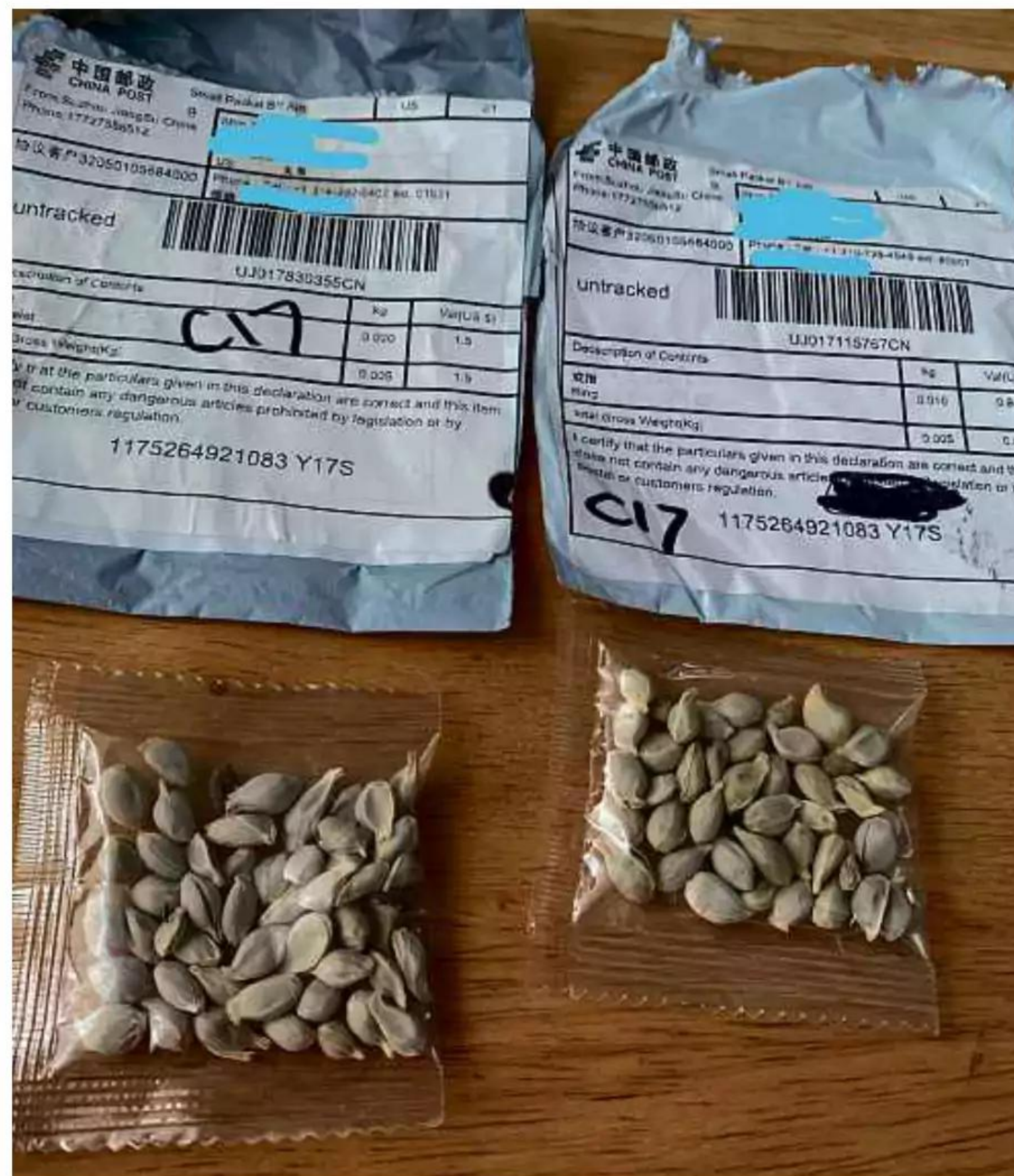
# SOWING THE SEEDS OF A MYSTERY

### Why have people been receiving packages of seeds they didn't order?

Packages of unidentified seeds, apparently posted from China, were received in July by residents of over a dozen US states. Despite US Department of Agriculture (USDA) warnings that recipients should dispose of the mystery packages – for fear they could be non-native species with the potential to upset local ecosystems, or that they might carry pests and diseases as a form of eco-terrorism – several US citizens who sowed the seeds reported they produced at least 14 plant species, including mint, lavender and roses. Some people subsequently came forward and contacted their local agricultural departments asking them to collect the resulting mystery plants (or, in some cases, fruitless seeds).

Tiffany Lowery of Kentucky said she thought the seeds had been sent from her planting club. “I didn’t realise it was a thing until I saw it on the news,” she told reporters. Texan Patricia Smith also thought the seeds were a gift from a group she belongs to: “I planted them in a pot, they never came up, so I didn’t think any more of it.” Shelley Aucoin of Louisiana had purchased some seeds from Amazon and assumed the seed package she received in the mail was the fulfilment of her order. Doyle Crenshaw of Arkansas told local news channel 5News: “We brought them down here and planted the seeds just to see what would happen. Every two weeks I’d come by and put Miracle Grow on it and they just started growing like crazy.” Mr Crenshaw said he planted the seeds in his garden months ago and that they had produced large white fruit and orange flowers resembling a squash plant.

Although the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) said in a release: “Seeds for planting pose a significant risk



ABOVE: Mystery seeds handed in to the US Department of Agriculture.

for US agriculture and natural resources because they can carry seed-borne viruses or other diseases,” the agency’s preliminary analysis has shown the seed packets included a mix of ornamental, fruit, vegetable, herb and weed species, and that they did not believe the seeds were linked to “agro-terrorism”.

US Customs and Border Protection, who are assisting the USDA’s investigation, say they have intercepted similar seed shipments in recent years.

The mysterious packets have led to a change of policy by Amazon, who will henceforth only permit the sale of seeds by

sellers based in the USA. The new guidelines also prohibit the sale of seeds within the USA by non-US residents. Unsolicited seed packets have also been received in other countries, including the UK. Last month, Scottish authorities cautioned people not to handle the seeds.

Rather than anything more sinister, it’s believed that the seed parcels were part of a global ‘brushing’ scam whereby low value items are posted in a bid to generate positive online reviews that would enhance a vendor’s reputation. *theguardian.com*, 28 July, 3 Aug; *BBC News*, 6 Sep 2020.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### DILDO FOR PRESIDENT

Economist, 30 Mar 2019.

### There's a demon living in the White House

Toronto Star, 23 Aug 2020.

### DEMON ATTACKS WOMAN AT CHRISTMAS MARKET PARADE

Times, 13 Dec 2019.

### Edinburgh zombie hospital still not open

Morning Star, 16 Sept 2019.

### ALIENS SMELL LIKE FARTS

popularmechanics.com, 25 Nov 2019.

### Sabre-toothed anchovies roamed the oceans 45 million years ago

sciencemag.org, 12 May 2020.

USDA



## SIDELINES...

### SPROUT EMERGENCY

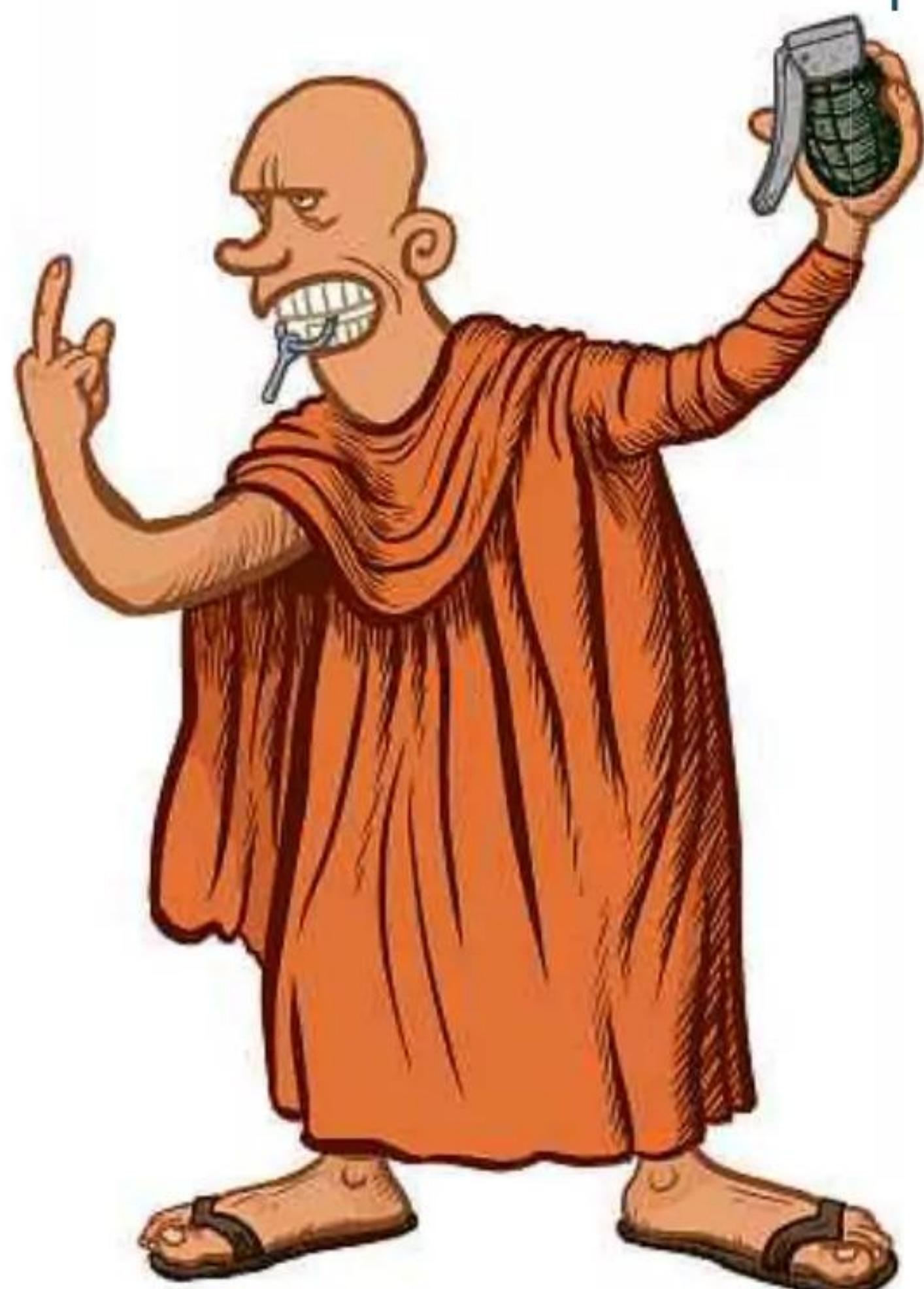
Police in England and Wales complained about frivolous 999 calls, the Met fielding 25,000 timewasting queries in 2019 alone. One person asked “Where can I buy Brussel sprouts?”, explaining it was an emergency as “I haven’t got any for Christmas dinner.” A woman called to complain about the after-effects of a curry; someone rang police asking for a lift home as they had disembarked at the wrong train station; a man dialled 999 to ask the time; and another called to complain about having bought some out-of-date biscuits. *D.Express, Sun, 31 Dec 2019*

### RARIFIED TASTES

A poacher, one of India’s most wanted men, who allegedly killed tigers and ate sloth bears’ genitals, has finally been captured after six years on the run. He confessed to killing several tigers, hundreds of peacock and wild boar, and explained that he ate the sloth bear genitals for their aphrodisiac properties. Sloth bears are protected by law, but their gall bladders (a prized ingredient in traditional medicine) are highly valuable and illegally trafficked. *<i>, 25 Oct 2019.*

### ANGRY MONK

Thai police arrested a Buddhist monk after he tossed a grenade at his neighbour, a Mr Rungrot, 61, who told police he had had a long feud with local monk Phra Sak, 48. A search of Phra Sak’s house revealed nothing illegal and a urine test showed he had not taken any drugs. *thaivisa.com, 17 Aug 2020.*



MARTIN ROSS

## COVID CORNER

Cambodian scarecrows versus the coronavirus, plus giant veg in lockdown



**ABOVE:** Cambodian farmer Sok Chany has posted two ‘Ting Mong’, armed with stocks, in front of her house in Trapeang Sla village in Kampong Province. **BELOW:** Ton Pheang puts the finishing touches to his second ‘Ting Mong’.

### SCARE-COVIDS

Cambodian farmers have been erecting scarecrow-type effigies to ward off coronavirus. Known as ‘Ting Mong’ in the Khmer language, they have been used in the past to protect villages from sicknesses like dengue or water-borne diarrhoea. “It is our ancient superstition to set up Ting Mongs when there are dangerous diseases or to avert evil,” farmer Sok Chany, 45, told reporters. She has posted two in front of her wooden stilt home in Trapeang Sla village located in Kampong Cham province, about 110km (68 miles) northeast of the capital Phnom Penh. One floral-shirted Ting Mong is armed with a stick and has a plastic pot for a head. The other has a stick propped like a rifle across its hay-stuffed chest, and wears jungle greens.

Despite the majority of Cambodians being Buddhist, animistic beliefs and practices survive and are incorporated into the peoples’ daily lives and rituals. The Ting Mongs are intended to ward off evil spirits who may seek to harm a family by inflicting disease upon it.

*“We’ve been fine since the outbreak,” said Ton Pheang*



In Trapeang Sla village, a Ting Mong is tied to the gate of nearly every home, though the skill and effort with which each has been constructed does vary. Some are elaborately dressed in military

uniform or floral pyjamas, while others are basically stuffed bags wearing sunglasses.

Farmer Ton Pheang’s Ting Mong is dressed in a bright pink shirt and wears a helmet for a head. “This is my second one,” explained the 55-year-old. He said that his first creation had been standing guard under sun and rain since April when the pandemic first began to spread across Southeast Asia, but then “it broke”. “We’ve been fine since the outbreak,” he concluded. “I’ll continue to leave it up as long as Covid still exists.”

So far, Cambodia appears to have escaped the worst of the pandemic, with just 283 infections and no deaths – so perhaps the Ting Mongs are doing their job. *france24.com; bangkokpost.com, 11 Oct 2020.*

### VACCINE FEARS

A World Economic Forum poll has revealed that only three in four adults would be happy to take a coronavirus vaccine, were an effective one to be developed. The survey questioned 20,000 people worldwide, with 26 per

PHOTOS: TANG CHHIN SOTHY / APP VIA GETTY IMAGES





cent saying they would not willingly accept a Covid-19 vaccination. Evidently the anti-vaxxer movement has gained some traction as a result of the pandemic, with (albeit discredited) concerns about a link between autism and the MMR vaccine encouraging suspicion about a mass anti-Covid vaccination programme. Some of the wilder theories see Bill Gates using the pandemic as a Trojan horse with which to introduce microscopic chips into people's bodies by means of a mass coronavirus vaccination programme. Billionaire George Soros has become another hate-figure for the conspirasphere, who accuse the Hungarian Jewish financier of everything from destabilising sterling (he actually *did* do this in 1992, pocketing £1 billion in the process), working towards a one-world government, and advancing the 'transgender agenda'. *D.Telegraph, 2 Sept 2020.*

## SNAKE MASK REPLICA

A passenger boarded a bus going from Swinton to Manchester using a snake as a face covering. Another traveller reportedly thought the snake was a "funky mask" before she saw it slithering over handrails. Greater Manchester transport officials have confirmed that a snake is not a valid face covering. *BBC News, 16 Sept 2020.*

## NEANDERTHAL GENES

Researchers at Stockholm's Karolinska Institutet and Leipzig's Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology have suggested that people with Neanderthal genes have a greater risk of developing severe Covid-19 symptoms such as respiratory difficulties that require artificial ventilation. The study analysed a gene cluster on chromosome 3, and found that people with a certain version of this cluster were three times more likely to have severe Covid-19. Further analysis revealed that this version is very similar to DNA sequences seen in the remains of 50,000-year-old Neanderthals found in Croatia.

The study's leader, Hugo Zeberg, said: "It turns out that

this gene variant was inherited by modern humans from the Neanderthals when they interbred some 60,000 years ago. Today, the people who inherited this gene variant are three times more likely to need artificial ventilation if they are infected by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2".

According to the researchers, this gene variant is particularly common among people in South Asia, which may be a clue as to why Britons with South Asian ancestry are at higher risk of serious illness and death from Covid-19 and have featured in disproportionately high numbers in national coronavirus death statistics. In Europe, around one in six carries the risk variant, while in Africa and East Asia it is almost non-existent. Disproportionately high Covid death rates among Black British people have instead been attributed to demographic factors, particularly employment, with, for example, bus and train drivers having been particularly vulnerable to contracting the virus.

Svant Paabo, director of the Max Planck Institute, said: "It is striking that the genetic heritage from the Neanderthals has such tragic consequences during the current pandemic. Why this is must now be investigated as quickly as possible". *D.Mirror, 1 Oct 2020.*

## TURNIP FOR THE BOOKS

Most horticultural shows have been cancelled this year due to the pandemic, leaving supersized vegetable growers

few opportunities to show off their produce in the flesh.

Instead, some growers have been submitting photos of their prize produce by email. The National Vegetable Society (NVS) moved some of its competitions online, while other competitions went on tour. Thus, five-time record holder Joe Atherton, from Mansfield Woodhouse in Nottinghamshire, was able to have his swedes scrutinised and his parsnips perused by the judges. Mr Atherton, 65, took some of his giant vegetables to The Grow Show: On Tour in Mansfield. He is hoping to have set a sixth world record this year, for the longest salsify (similar to a parsnip). His whopping root vegetable grew to 5.5m (18ft) during lockdown. He also beat his own longest beetroot record with an 8.5m (28ft) behemoth.

Several first-time giant veg growers have also expressed an interest this year. "I don't usually do giant vegetables," said Dominic Driscoll, from Wingerworth in Derbyshire. "I do the show vegetables where they look nice, rather than oversized, but I got the seeds and thought I'd give it a go." His 22kg (48lb) cabbage grown on his allotment during lockdown is certainly oversized. "It's kind of exciting, the thrill of the growing," he commented, adding "the harvesting is the sad bit really." Mr Driscoll, 39, unable to display his Cornish cabbage, did the only thing he could do – eat it. "We had some last night," he said. "It was fantastic – really fresh and crisp." *BBC News, 4 Sept 2020.*



ABOVE: Dominic Driscoll, dwarfed by his supersized lockdown cabbage.

## SIDELINES...

### BLESS THIS BOMB

The Russian Orthodox Church plans to ban priests from blessing nuclear missiles and other heavy weaponry. Traditionally, Orthodox priests have blessed people, homes and ships, but in recent years, becoming closer to the military, priests have sprinkled holy water and prayed over missiles, tanks, and other large weapons. A Church commission recommends blessing be restricted to servicemen and their personal weapons. Head of the Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kyrill defended the practice in 2015 after a nuclear missile named 'Satan' was blessed. *D.Telegraph, 5 Feb 2020*

### WEATHER REPORT

A civil servant has been awarded £250,000 by an employment tribunal after it heard how Anne Giwa-Amu, of mixed Nigerian and Welsh ancestry, joined the Department for Work and Pensions based in Caerphilly in 2017 and was subjected to "deliberate and humiliating harassment". She was branded a racist after saying it always rained in Wales and was repeatedly accused of stealing ice cream. *D.Express, 28 May 2020.*

### BRICK BATTERY

Washington University scientists have developed a method for converting red bricks into batteries. Engineers have previously recognised the brick's ability to absorb and store the Sun's energy, but this is the first time a method for converting a red brick into a supercapacitor has been proposed. A polymer coating inside a brick serves as an ion sponge that stores and conducts electricity, and the iron oxide or rust that give bricks their red colour works to trigger the polymerisation process. [UPI] 12 Aug 2020.



DOMINIC DRISCOLL / TWITTER

MARTIN ROSS





## SIDELINES...

### INCORRIGIBLE ROGUE

A car thief arrested while attempting to steal a car pickpocketed the arresting officer while detained in a police vehicle. Bolton Crown Court heard how Anthony Connor, 32, was caught when he dropped the wallet between his legs and began fumbling. Asked what he was doing, Connor replied: "I am sorry – I didn't know it was your wallet." *D.Mail*, 20 May 2020.

### DESPICABLE ME

A 26-year-old Florida man was sentenced to 10 days imprisonment after attacking another man dressed as a 'Minion'. Police said Ryan Nihart knocked over and kicked Jamie Roehm as he was walking on Daytona Beach's boardwalk. As well as jail time, Nihart was ordered to pay for damage to Mr Roehm's costume and told to attend a 'moral recognition therapy' course. *Palm Beach Post*, 30 Jan 2019.

### TREE HUGGER

A Florida woman has married a tree in a bid to prevent it from being cut down. Karen Cooper has wed an Indian laurel or giant ficus tree that has stood in a public park for over 100 years. The tree had been earmarked for destruction by the local council because some of its root system extends into private property. "If they cut down this tree," said Ms Cooper, "I'm going to be a widow". *Palm Beach Post*, 26 Mar 2018.

### WHAT'S THE HURRY?

When police stopped a driver doing 109mph (175kph) on the A30 near Sherborne in Dorset, he told them "I'm in a hurry to go fishing." Another motorist stopped on the same stretch of road for speeding said he was in a hurry to buy dog food. *D.Express*, 28 May 2020.



MARTIN ROSS

## RELIGION ROUND-UP | Russian 'Jesus' behind bars and Pope's blood snatched



OLEG NIKISHIN / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Sergei Torop gives a sermon at the Vissarion Church of the Last Testament in 2002; he was arrested on 22 September. BELOW: The exterior of the Vissarion Church in Petropavlovka, Siberia, one of the many rural hamlets where Torop's followers live.

### 'JESUS' ARRESTED IN RUSSIA

Sergei Anatolyevitch Torop, aka Vissarion ('He who gives new life'), the Russian ex-traffic cop who claims to be the reincarnation of Jesus (**FT126:06, 231:05**) and who has led the messianic Church of the Last Testament cult for the past three decades, was arrested on 22 September after a large operation involving agents from Russia's FSB security service as well as police and other agencies.

Vans, buses, ambulances and helicopters all took part in the raid on the cult's City of the Sun settlement, located on a hill in the remote Krasnoyarsk region of Siberia where several thousand of Vissarion's followers live in a series of remote hamlets. Armed officers stormed the cult leader's headquarters, arresting him and two of his right-hand men,

one of whom, Vadim Redkin, is a former drummer from a Soviet-era boyband. Masked troops led the long-haired, bearded, ascetic-looking Vissarion and his two aides to a waiting helicopter.

Russia's investigative committee announced that Vissarion will be charged with organising an illegal religious organisation, extorting money from cult members and subjecting them to emotional abuse. Around 4,000 'Vissarionites' – including Russian musicians, actresses,

teachers, doctors, former Red Army colonels, and an ex-deputy railways minister from Belarus – live in a series of 30 rural hamlets in the Krasnoyarsk area. A substantial number of Western European converts also live there, and it is believed he has another 6,000 followers worldwide.

They espouse ecological values and collectivism and believe in reincarnation and the imminent apocalypse, but the cult also contains elements of Russian Orthodox theology.

Money is banned in the commune, as is smoking, drinking and swearing, and veganism is compulsory (with the exception of infants and breast-feeding mothers). The cult has its own rituals, laws, symbols, prayers and hymns, and its own calendar (Christmas being replaced by a new feast day on 14 January, Vissarion's birthday).

Vissarion lost his job as a traffic



ALEXANDER NEMENOV / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES





officer in 1989 as the Soviet economy faltered amid the overthrow of communism in the Warsaw Pact countries. The following year, amid the turmoil of the Soviet Union's collapse, he experienced his 'awakening', realising himself to be the second coming of Christ. In 1991, the final year of the USSR's existence (and, incidentally, the same year in which David Icke revealed himself to be the 'Son of the Godhead'), Vissarion founded his Church of the Last Testament.

Initially, he claimed that Jesus was watching over the world while in orbit close to Earth, and that the Virgin Mary was "running Russia", but he later declared himself to be Jesus. In 2002 he expounded his belief system to a British journalist, explaining that while he was indeed Jesus Christ, he was not God: "It's all very complicated," he began. "But to keep things simple, yes, I am Jesus Christ. That which was promised must come to pass. And it was promised in Israel 2,000 years ago that I would return, that I would come back to finish what was started. I am not God. And it is a mistake to see Jesus as God. But I am the living word of God the Father. Everything that God wants to say, he says through me."

It is unclear what his followers will do now that their spiritual



leader has been arrested, nor is it clear why authorities decided to act now. The Russian Orthodox Church have opposed and condemned the cult for many years, but government officials had until now left it undisturbed. It has been suggested that the Vissarionite community had recently become involved in a dispute with local business interests. *Guardian*, 30 May 1999; 24 May 2002; *rferl.org*, *Guardian*, 22 Sept 2020.

## BLOOD OF THE POPE

A reliquary containing drops of the blood of Saint Pope John Paul II has been stolen from Spoleto cathedral in central Italy. The container, made of gold and crystal, was taken from an altar dedicated to the Polish pope, who died in 2005. The relic was only in Spoleto cathedral

temporarily, and was due to be moved next month to a new church in the Umbria region.

"Give the reliquary back to the cathedral and the faithful," implored Archbishop Renato Boccardo, for many years a close aide to Pope John Paul II. "It would be the serious thing to do". It was not clear whether the reliquary had been stolen for the purpose of ransom, as has been the case with other Italian relic heists. Police are studying CCTV footage taken inside and outside the cathedral. Another reliquary containing John Paul II's blood was pilfered in 2014 (FT312:4) *news.abc-cbn.com*, 26 Sept 2020.

An installation by Polish sculptor Jerzy Kalina entitled "Poisoned Source" and depicting late Pope John Paul II holding a meteorite over his head as he stands in a pool of red water representing blood, was unveiled outside the National Museum in Warsaw in September. The work is an artistic response to a controversial statue created by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan in 1999, which showed a space rock striking down the late Pope (FT131:11). A statement on the museum's website said: "In Kalina's view, John Paul II is not a powerless old man crushed by a meteorite, but a titan of superhuman strength." [AFP] 24 Sept 2020.

## SIDELINES...

### ONLY IN FLORIDA 1

A man walked into a Jacksonville convenience store while carrying a live alligator with its mouth taped shut. "Ya'll ain't out of beer, are you?" he asked the shop assistant, before spotting someone in the back of the store and saying, "Is he taking the last bit of beer?" Florida wildlife investigators are looking into the incident. *Palm Beach Post*, 29 July 2018.

### ONLY IN FLORIDA 2

A man dressed as the superhero Iron Man walked into a South Florida blood bank and pointed a gun at a clerk, demanding money. He was wearing a red costume with a hood that zipped up into a mask. *Palm Beach Post*, 1 May 2017.

### TOOTH RETURNED

Belgium is to return a tooth – the only remains of Congo's first prime minister – to his family after he was murdered by Belgian-backed militia in 1961. It was seized in 2016 during an investigation into the execution of Patrice Lumumba, months after he became prime minister. His body was dissolved in acid by Gérard Soete, a Belgian police commissioner, who kept the tooth as a ghoulish trophy. *D. Telegraph*, 10 Sept 2020.

### SAGE ADVICE

Firefighters called to reports of a smoke alarm going off in a Long Eaton, Derbyshire, house arrived to find a man dressed in a "religious outfit" who had carried out an exorcism to get rid of "an unwanted presence". A spokesperson for Stapleford fire station said: "This was a false alarm caused by smoke from an exorcism. Sage had been lit and triggered the smoke detection system." *ilkestonadvertiser.co.uk*, 17 Aug 2020.

### DIET PLANS TRUMPED

Donald Trump's former doctor has described hiding cauliflower in mashed potato and making ice cream "less accessible" in attempts to help the president lose weight. But Dr Ronny Jackson's efforts were in vain, as Trump gained 4lb (1.8kg), tipping him into the 'obese' category. *<i>*, 26 Feb 2020.



ABOVE: Jerzy Kalina's "Poisoned Source" shows Pope John Paul II holding a meteor aloft. TOP: The purloined Spoleto reliquary.





# STRANGE DAYS

## SIDELINES...

### SCENTS AND SENSIBILITY

Scientists have extracted the aromas of some of Britain's most historic works held at Oxford's Bodleian Library, which will be made available to visitors via 'scratch-and-sniff' cards at an exhibition this autumn. A copy of the Magna Carta has a scent reminiscent of "moist wheat bread and beach sand" or "newly pressed sheets with traces of old socks". Other works include a Shakespeare First Folio and ancient Ethiopian and Egyptian texts. *D.Mail*, 30 Mar 2020.

### CHOCOLATE CITY

A Swiss town was left covered in chocolate after a malfunction at a Lindt factory. Particles of a fine cocoa powder showered Olten, between Zurich and Basel, after the combination of a ventilation system failure and strong winds. *D.Mail*, 18 Aug 2020.

### RESCUE DOG RESCUED

Daisy, a four-year-old St Bernard rescue dog, had to be rescued from England's highest mountain after collapsing and showing signs of leg pain. 16 members of the Wasdale Mountain Rescue Team took five hours to stretcher-carry the "massive" dog down from the 978 metre (3,209ft) high Cumbrian mountain. *BBC News*, 26 July 2020.

### ILLEGAL NASAL BLOCKAGE

A man stuffed a wad of cannabis up his nose 18 years ago in a prison smuggling attempt. Unfortunately, the 48-year-old Australian "accidentally pushed the package deeper into his nostril" and believed he had swallowed it, despite suffering constant headaches, nasal obstructions and sinus infections. Eventually, doctors removed the drug parcel after a CT scan showed it was still lodged in his nostril. *<i>*

### TOILET FROGS

Residents of a Derbyshire town have been inundated by a plague of frogs invading their homes through sinks and drains. Some have even found the green amphibians emerging from their U-bends, attempting to climb the sides of toilet bowls. Yorkshire Water suggested the frogs could be breeding in underground watercourses around Chesterfield. *derbytelegraph.co.uk*, 1 May 2020.

## OUT OF THEIR DEPTH | Patrol boat meets its match, plus castaways' calamity



ABOVE: The RCGS *Resolute*, showing minor damage to her prow after getting the better of a belligerent Venezuelan naval vessel.

### NAVAL FOLLIES

The *Naiguatá*, a Venezuelan patrol vessel, was involved in a bizarre naval incident after encountering cruise liner RCGS *Resolute* in Caribbean international waters, having stopped to repair her engines. For some reason, the *Naiguatá*'s captain ordered *Resolute* to dock at a Venezuelan port, a strange order during the coronavirus pandemic since other countries had been refusing to allow cruise ships, potentially full of infected passengers, to berth. *Resolute* radioed head office to seek guidance, but the delay in obeying his orders seems to have angered *Naiguatá*'s captain, who opened fire on the cruise liner. As well as her 76mm main gun, *Naiguatá* is armed with an air/missile defence gun, two machine guns and some small arms. The gunfire failing to have the desired effect on *Resolute*, the *Naiguatá* proceeded to ram her. However, *Resolute*, a purpose-built polar expedition vessel specialising in Antarctic cruises, has a reinforced hull designed to withstand collisions with icebergs. As a result, the *Naiguatá* fared worse, its 20-man crew having to be rescued from the sinking vessel, while the liner suffered only minor damage. *Resolute*'s

owners described the action as an "act of aggression in international waters", while Venezuela accused the *Resolute* of an act of "aggression and piracy", also saying it "did not rule out" that the cruise ship "was transporting mercenaries to attack military bases in Venezuela". *BBC News*, 3 Apr; *Twitter*, @canocola, 4 Apr 2020.

### PACIFIC SURVIVAL

Four people on a boat lost in the Pacific were rescued after surviving 32 days adrift. The four (two men, a woman, and a 12-year-old girl) were among 12 passengers who set sail from Papua New Guinea on 22 December 2019 with the

intention of spending Christmas on the Carteret Islands, 60 miles (96km) away. However, their boat capsized, leading to several deaths by drowning.

The survivors managed to right the boat and climb back in, but more passengers died as they drifted far from land, dragged by strong ocean currents. A total of eight passengers died, the survivors saved only when a fishing vessel spotted them on 23 January. They had drifted over 1,200 miles (1,930km) off course. They say they survived by eating coconuts found floating in the ocean, and by drinking rainwater. *D.Telegraph*, 13 Feb 2020.



ABOVE: Two of the survivors, safe in the Solomon Islands after 32 days adrift.



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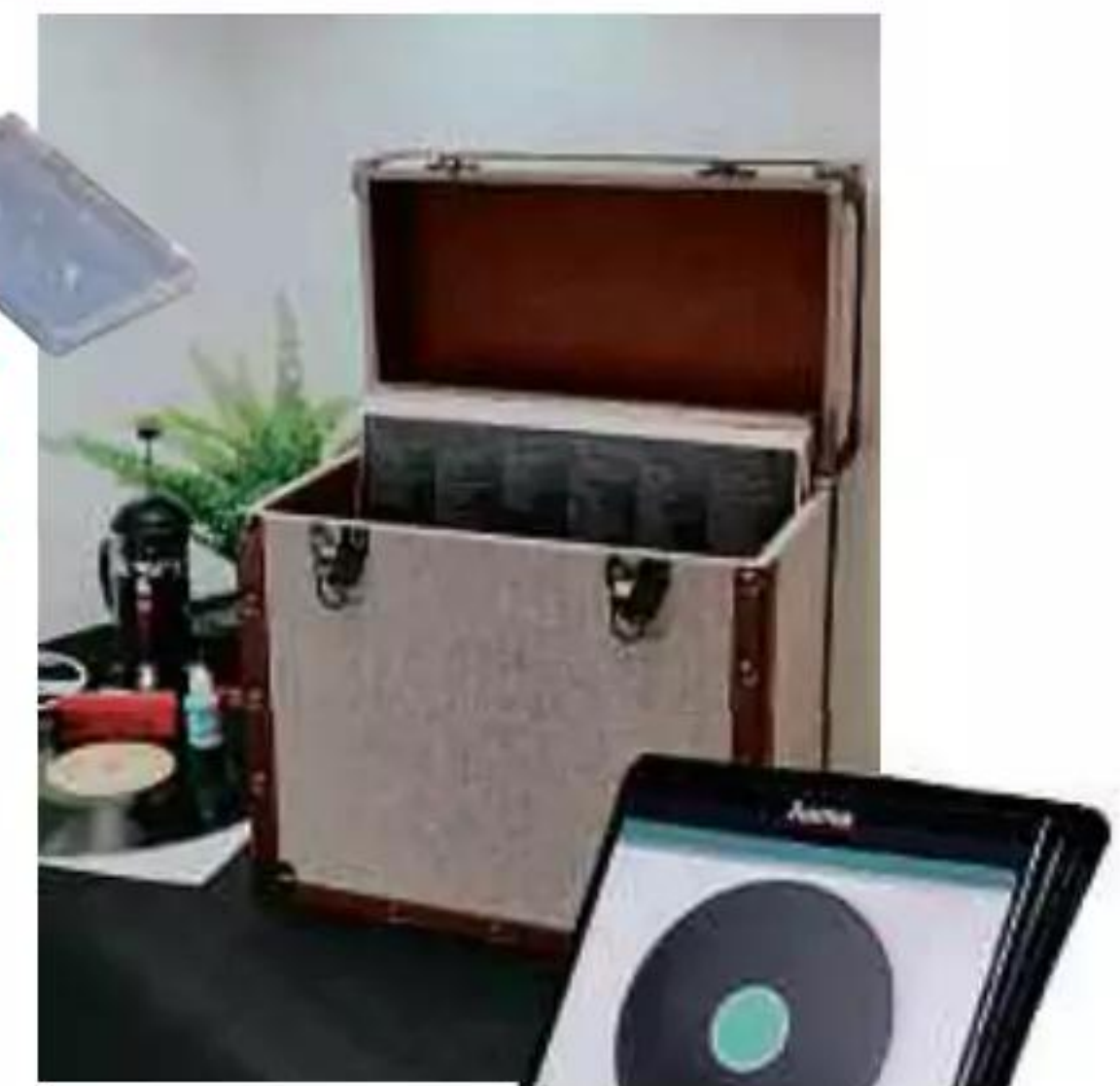
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PAUL SIEVEKING surveys the latest archaeological discoveries from around the world

## JADE DOG

Alfred Correya, 66, rummaging recently in a chest of drawers in his garage in Taunton, Somerset, found a tiny jade dog. The amulet, made from tremolite-nephrite jade, is probably from the Liangzhu culture in south-west China (c.3400-2250 BC). It measures 63.1x19.9x20.8mm and is valued at £2-3 million. Jade dog amulets were often made and worn for protection, and those of the Liangzhu culture were among the finest. Alfred's father, Indian gem dealer Wilfred Correya, emigrated to Britain with him in the 1960s and died in 2012 aged 96. Alfred suspects the amulet was buried with its owner before being stolen by grave robbers and sold as a trinket to his father in the 1950s. It could be the oldest jewellery dog in the world. *www.ancient.eu, Sun, 29 Jan 2020.*

## MENHIRS OF CENTRAL FRANCE

Around 30 prehistoric menhirs and a human skeleton have been found in a 150m (490ft) -long excavation in central France ahead of the widening of the A75 motorway near Veyre-Monton, about 360km (224 miles) south-southeast of Paris. This is the first time that menhirs have been found in Auvergne, or anywhere in the centre of France. They were toppled into pits and buried some time in prehistory. The stones measure between 1m (3ft) and 1.6m (5ft), and probably extend beyond the excavation area. They are in a north-south alignment, in the style of megalithic Armorican monuments. As at Carnac, the largest stood at the top of the slope towards the north, and the smallest closer together towards the south.



ALFRED CORREYA

ABOVE: The jade dog found by Alfred Correya in a draw in his garage dates from c.3400-2250 BC. BELOW: Some of the prehistoric menhirs uncovered during an excavation ahead of the widening of the A75 motorway in France.

One group is bordered by another alignment, of which five stones are arranged in a horseshoe curve. Six other regularly spaced blocks form a 15m (50ft) diameter circle. One stone is more sculpted, and largely anthropomorphic – the only example known in the Auvergne. It has a rounded head, rough shoulders, and two small breasts. The excavation also revealed a burial with the remains of a tall man covered by a quadrangular cairn 14m (46ft) long and 6.5m (21ft) wide. There appears to be little to help date the stones precisely, but further analysis is planned. Early estimates suggest that the finds could date anywhere from 6,000 to 1,000 BC. *francetvinfo.fr, 26 Aug; connexionfrance.com, 27 Aug 2019.*

## PORTUGUESE TIMBER CIRCLES

The remains of several timber circles constructed over 4,500 years ago have been discovered at Perdigões in the Evora district in southern Portugal. Archaeologists have been excavating the complex for more than 20 years. While chief excavator António Valera prefers not to call them 'woodhenges', the design is similar to the monument in Wiltshire, with wooden posts encircling an area with a diameter of about 20m (66ft). Only about a third of the circles have been excavated so far, and only post holes and ditches remain. There is an opening in one that appears to be aligned to the summer solstice. The ceremonial complex was likely constructed between 2800 BC and 2600 BC, roughly contemporaneous with Stonehenge. Most of the artefacts found so far consist of pottery fragments and animal remains.

The Perdigões complex covers about 40 acres (16ha) of land and includes burial grounds and standing stones. People would have used the complex between roughly 3500 BC and 2000 BC for burial and ceremonial activities. *livescience.com, 11 Aug 2020.*

## FARMING PIONEERS

Pollen analysis and dendrochronology (tree ring dating) have shown that the Ceide Fields complex in northern Mayo, Ireland, is one of Europe's best-preserved ancient agricultural landscapes, worked from around 3800 to 3400 BC. (For comparison, the main period of pyramid-building in Egypt began around 2589 BC.)

"Fossil pollen evidence suggests that it was more intensive than any farming of



CONSEIL DÉPARTEMENTAL DU PUY-DE-DÔME



Neolithic age so far recorded in Ireland or Britain,” according to pollen expert Michael O’Connell. The pollen evidence, taken in conjunction with the large fields of up to 10 acres in size, indicated “more than likely a cattle-based farming economy”, he said, but cereal was also grown. Curiously, the intensive early Neolithic farming phase was followed by reduced activity over three centuries, and then a lull that lasted several centuries, during which farming was abandoned and the blanket bog expanded. Evidently, a shift towards wetter and cooler climate did not explain the dramatic change. Researchers suggest that “cultural and socio-economic factors” triggered a “considerable population decline”. A mystery then. *Sunday Times*, 16 Feb 2020.

## BANANA FARMS DOWN UNDER

Indigenous Australians farmed bananas over two millennia ago. The sites, which date back 2,145 years, were found on Mabuyag Island north of the mainland. Banana microfossils, stone tools, charcoal and a series of retaining walls were found at the site. “Our research shows the ancestors of the Goegmulgal people of Mabuyag were engaged in complex and diverse cultivation and horticultural practices in the western Torres Strait at least 2,000 years ago,” lead researcher Robert Williams said. He said the Torres Strait had been historically viewed as a “separating line” between Indigenous groups in New Guinea, who practised agriculture, and those in Australia who were labelled “hunter gatherers”. But the findings show that the strait was “more of a bridge or a filter” for horticultural practices across both regions. The agricultural system reflected the local regional diet at the time, which included staples such as yams, taro and bananas. Historians have argued that the British denied evidence of Indigenous agriculture so they could claim the land was unsettled and unoccupied. *BBC News*, 12 Aug 2020.

## LARGEST IRON AGE COIN HOARD

Tipped off back in the 1980s by a farmer’s daughter who as a child was given ancient coins her father had dug up in a Jersey field while planting potatoes, Reg Mead and Richard Miles spent decades with their metal detectors searching for more. Eventually, in June 2012, in the parish of Grouville on the east side of the island, they discovered 69,347 coins, dating from around 50 BC. Most are from the Coriosolitæ tribe of northern France, but some from other tribes – the Osismii, Redones and Baiocasses. They have now been recognised by Guinness World Records as the largest Iron Age coin hoard ever found, overtaking the hoard of 54,951 late Roman, low denomination coins found at the former Roman town of Cunetio in Wiltshire in 1978. The Jersey coins, made of silver and gold and worth an estimated £10 million, were found under a hedge in



**ABOVE:** Reg Meade and Richard Miles’s discovery has now been recognised as the largest Iron Age coin hoard ever found. **BELOW:** A Neanderthal yarn fragment from the Abri du Maras site in France.

a large mound of clay 3ft (90cm) down, weighing three quarters of a ton, that also contained 11 gold torques and other jewellery. Some of the treasure is now on display at La Hougue Bie Museum in Jersey. [www.jerseyheritage.org](http://www.jerseyheritage.org), *D.Telegraph*, 3 Feb 2020.

## FIRST RAMPS FOR THE DISABLED

Debby Sneed, an archaeologist at California State University, has suggested that ramps in Ancient Greek buildings as early as the 4th century BC are the first evidence of architecture adapted for disabled people, which may lead to a reassessment of the Greeks, whose philosophers supported eugenics and allowing disabled people to die. While ramps were common in Greek buildings, their presence has been neglected in research and are often missing on plans in scholarly articles. Ramps have erroneously been thought of as a “means of conveying sacrificial animals”. Dr Sneed analysed the distribution of ramps and found they were particularly common at healing sanctuaries, where disabled people would seek help from Asklepios (Asclepius), the god of medicine. “While the provision of access to mobility-impaired individuals may not have been the exclusive function of these ramps, it was a primary factor in their construction,” she argues.

Greece would have had many wounded soldiers and there is evidence that around 4 BC Athens provided a daily “disability” allowance. Literary sources also refer to prosthetics, while vases from as early as 7 BC show lower body impairments. It is accepted that longer

ramps, such as the 80x10m (262x33ft) one leading to the top of the Acropolis in Athens, were for wheeled traffic used in processions. Dr Sneed noted, however, that the Temple of Asklepios at Epidaurus had at least 11 stone ramps. “The available evidence indicates a trend whereby healing sanctuaries, which hosted many individuals with a range of illnesses, injuries and conditions, had more ramps than non-healing sanctuaries”. *thetimes.co.uk*, 21 July 2020.

## FIRST YARN?

Scientists have discovered what they believe to be the first direct evidence of yarn making, dating back more than 40,000 years. The 6mm-long cord fragment, found at Abri du Maras in the South of France, was made by Neanderthals in the Middle Palæolithic. The discovery was published in the journal *Scientific Reports*. Prior to this find, the oldest discovered fibre fragments were from the Ohalo II site in Israel, believed to be around 19,000 years old. *Shropshire Star*, 10 April 2020.







# By the light of the Moon

Belief in lunar influence is still pervasive, reports DAVID HAMBLING, but what does the science say?

The belief in subtle lunar influences on living things has waxed and waned like the Moon itself. Previously accepted as fact by scholars, it was later consigned to folklore, but odd, anomalous scientific results keep occurring. And the matter is still far from settled: the more biology we discover, the more complex it becomes.

The Moon has traditionally been linked to mental health, with 'lunatic' derived from *luna*, the Latin word for Moon. This may be because of the association with werewolves who are most apt to transform during the Full Moon. The British Lunacy Act of 1842 defined a lunatic as someone who was sane in the two weeks before a Full Moon, but prone to strange behaviour in the two weeks after the Full Moon. As recently as 1940, the defendant in a murder case tried to claim 'Moon madness' as a mitigating factor.

Modern statistical studies have sifted through data on the Moon and behaviour again and again. A 1972 American study found a lunar periodicity in homicides in Dade County, Florida, over a 15-year period, but not in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. A 1978 American study found that, over a five-year period, aggravated assaults were more frequent during a Full Moon, but a Finnish study found that homicides were lowest at Full Moon. Many other studies found no correlation.

A 1998 study at the maximum-security wing of Armley Jail in Leeds found a rise in the incidence of violence during the three days of the Full Moon. However, a similar study in the same year in five psychiatric facilities in the Sydney area of Australia found no correlation. Shrewdly, the researchers suggested that it would be worth looking into the belief in the lunar effect among health workers and what impact this might be having.

Such beliefs are still widespread and prevalent in areas where you might not expect. A Spanish study published this year concludes that there is no science-based evidence connecting lunar phases and plant physiology, and that "popular agricultural practices" relating to the Moon were without foundation. "We strongly encourage teachers involved in plant sciences education to objectively address pseudo-scientific ideas and promote critical thinking," the authors conclude in exasperation.

A 2018 statistical study by researchers in Qatar entitled "Lunacy revisited – the myth of the Full Moon: are football injuries



## The defendant in a murder case tried to claim 'Moon madness' as a mitigating factor

related to the lunar cycle?" examined various types of injury sustained by professional footballers during four consecutive playing seasons and how they related to the Moon. They concluded that there was no difference connected with the phases of the Moon, the Earth-Moon distance, or the tides.

"Thus, organisers need not consult Moon or tide tables when planning future event schedules," they conclude. Apparently, this is an issue in Qatar.

Similarly, a 2019 study found perhaps unsurprisingly that there was no connection between athletes' performance and the phases of the Moon. Even in the 21st century somebody felt this was research that needed to be undertaken.

However, while any connection with human behaviour looks increasingly tenuous, at the other end biologists are finding ways in which animals are influenced by the Moon. These are generally related to the effect of moonlight. For example, night-hunting lions are far more successful during the dark of the Moon. This may be the same reason that homicides are lower in Finland at Full Moon. Similarly, some bats change their foraging behaviour during the Full Moon, switching from forest canopy to open fields – because night-flying insects such as moths disperse more in bright moonlight.

Many sea creatures are now known to respond to lunar cues. One of the

most spectacular cases of Moon-driven behaviour is the mass spawning at the Great Barrier Reef. This occurs just once a year, when corals across the reef release eggs and sperm into the water. The chances of reproduction are best if this is synchronised, and the corals have evolved a timing mechanism linked to the Full Moon in November. Three to five days after the Full Moon, staghorn and plate corals spawn, creating an underwater snowstorm. On the surface, the water turns visibly pink.

Scientists previously assumed that this 'sex festival' – as it is known locally – was governed by the tides. They now believe that it is the light level from the Full Moon that provides the signal.

The question of tidal pull versus simple illumination effects is a key one. Those who believe in the profounder effects of the Moon stress the omnipresent tug of the Moon's gravity rather than it being a convenient light source. In 1954, American biologist Frank Brown found that oysters opened their shells at high tide, roughly twice a day. They were able to do this even when they were kept in tanks, inland in the dark. There were no cues from water currents or changes in temperature. Most significantly, when the oysters were flown inland from New England to Evanston, Illinois, they kept time with the local high tide – even though there is no actual tide in Evanston.

Oysters were seemingly able to sense tidal forces. The situation has been complicated since then by the discovery of genes driving a number of biological clocks. While most animals just have a 24-hour clock driven by the daily circadian rhythm, some creatures like oysters also seem to have circatidal clock.

No biological basis has been found for a tidal sense; it implies an exquisite sensitivity to tiny changes in gravitational force far beyond our other senses. One theory is that it might be magnetic, as some animals have been shown to have a magnetic sense. However, the influence of the Moon on the Earth's magnetic field is even less than the gravitational effect.

Research continues to be published on the lunar effect on everything from sleep quality to stock market performance. Obviously, the surprise positive results are more widely reported than negatives. Whether they are just statistical noise, or the result of *belief* in lunar influence rather than *actual* influence, looks like being a debate for years to come.

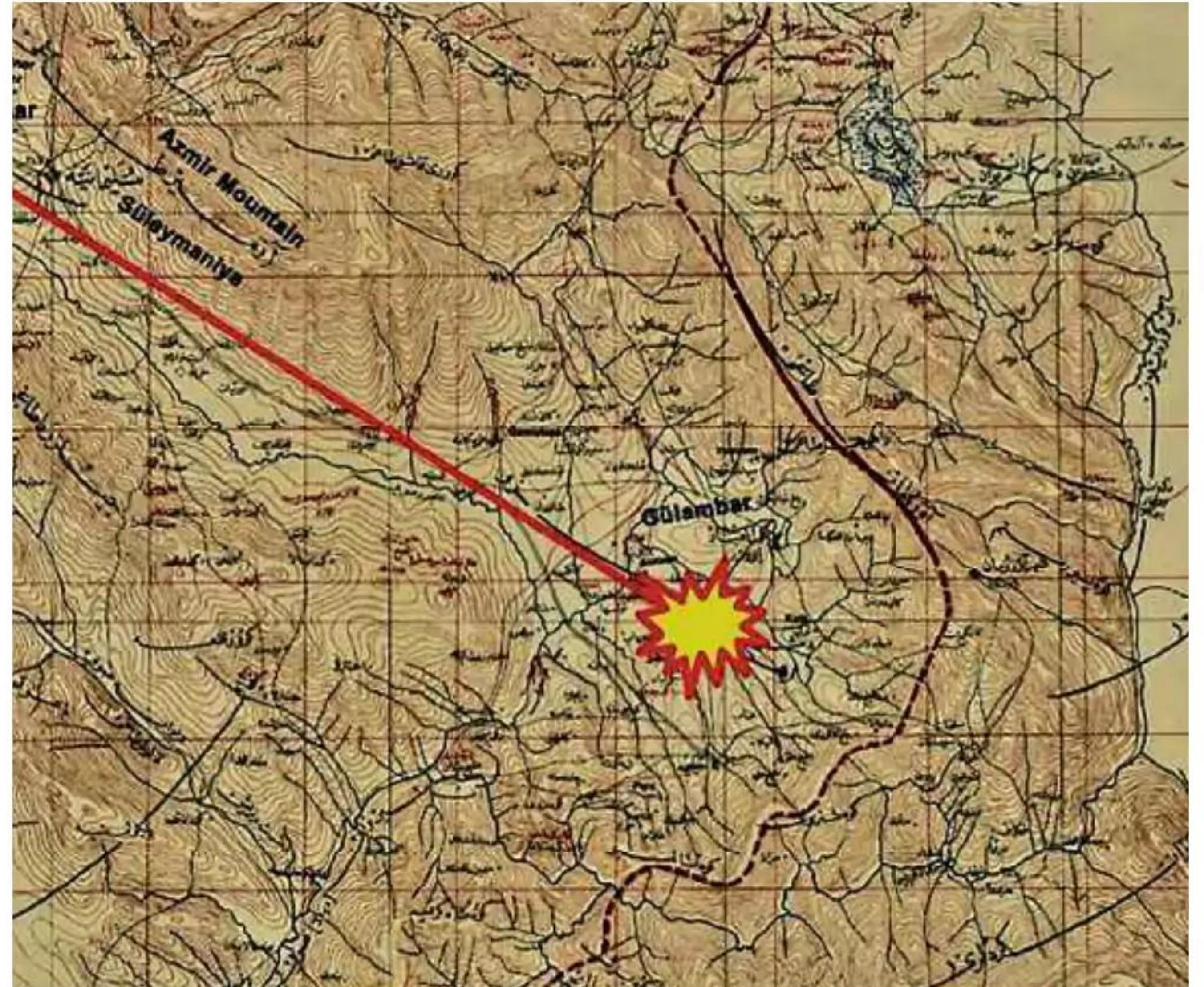




# STRANGE SKYFALLS | Snake from the sky, earliest evidence of death by meteor, and a surprising reason for Scotland's wet weather...



CHRIS TREDWELL



ABOVE: The plummeting snake that shocked Chris Tredwell. RIGHT: A map showing the flight path and impact point of the 1888 Turkish fireball. BELOW: The account of the meteor, written in Ottoman Turkish, found in the Turkish State Archives.

## SNAKE FROM ON HIGH

On 8 June, a snake fell from the sky, landing near a dog walker. Chris Tredwell was shocked to see the reptile drop from a crow's beak while out walking his dogs in Hartsholme Country Park, Lincoln. Initially mistaking it for a "yard-long" rope before seeing it land "within 12 inches" of him, Mr Tredwell identified it as a grass snake.

A spokesperson from Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust said grass snakes are a common sight in the county's parks, gardens and countryside, adding that "crows will eat anything they can get hold of."

Wildlife enthusiast Mr Tredwell, 75, said it was "quite rare to see one, never mind having it nearly drop on you. It's certainly the biggest one I've seen and it's the biggest one I've had dropped on me. I don't know who was most shocked – the snake or me. When it landed, it was a bit stunned." One of his dogs took a curious sniff before being put off by the snake's forked tongue. The snake retreated into nearby bushes. *BBC News, 18 June 2020.*

## EARLY METEOR STRIKE

Turkish researchers believe they have uncovered the earliest known evidence for a meteorite

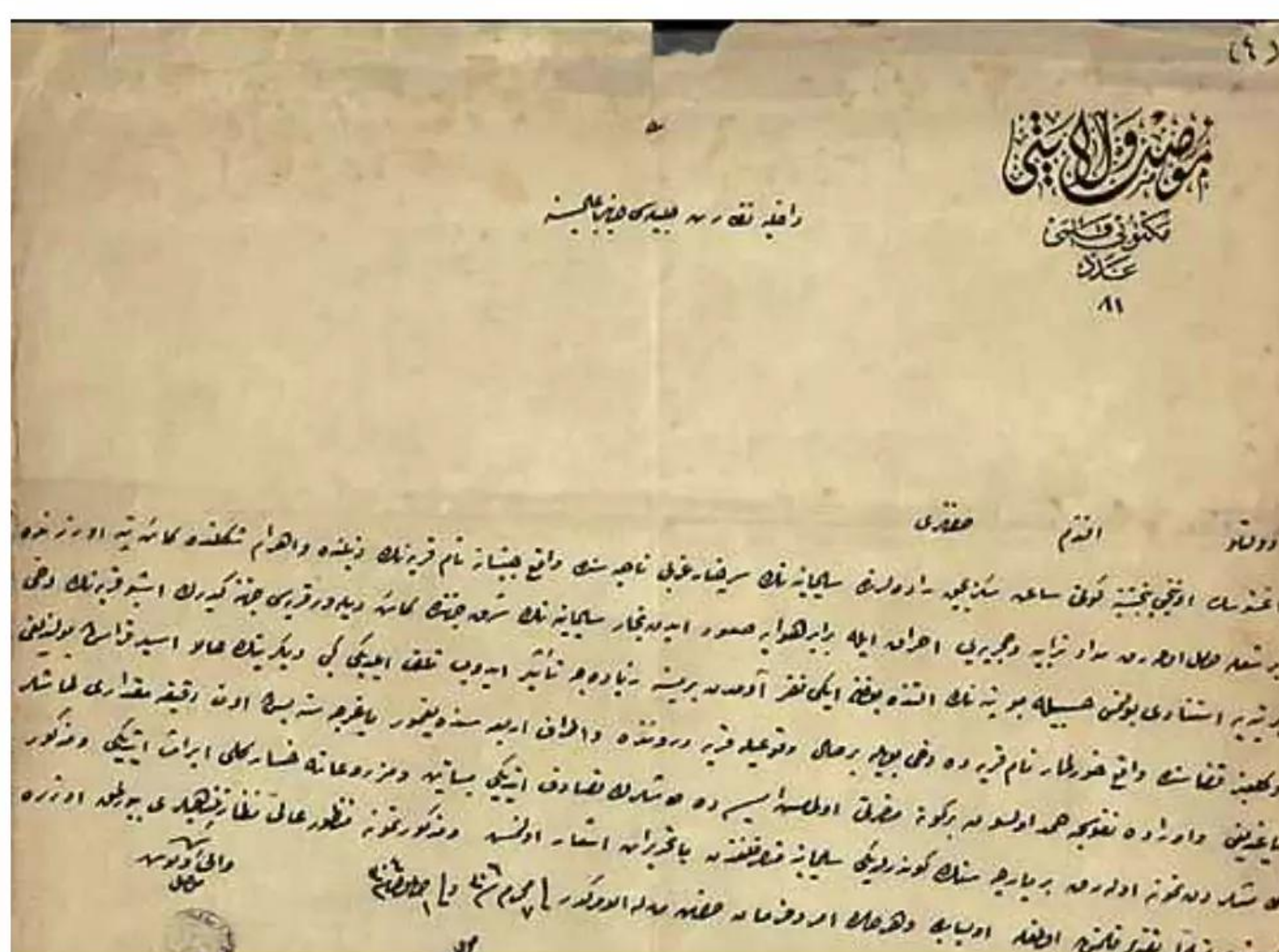
strike having caused a death. Documents found in the Turkish State Archives describe a fireball being seen in August 1888, followed by several objects falling over a 10-minute period, suggesting that a large meteor had exploded and fragmented high in the atmosphere. One of the smaller meteorites is reported to have killed one man and paralysed another when it smashed into a hilltop in a region now in Iraq. As well as the human casualties, nearby crops and fields were seriously damaged according to letters found in the archives written by local officials after the event. One of these

letters supposedly contained a sample of the meteorite, but it has yet to be found. The reason why these accounts had been overlooked for so long is probably that were written in Ottoman Turkish, the official language of the Ottoman Empire at the time (employing a complex alphabet based on Persian Arabic), whereas ordinary people generally spoke traditional Turkish. *sciencemag.org, 22 Apr; popularmechanics.com, 27 Apr 2020.*

## SCOTLAND'S HARD RAIN

Radiation from nuclear weapons tests by the USA and USSR

during the Cold War made Scotland wetter than usual, according to a new report by Reading University researchers. Even though test detonations were carried out thousands of miles away, there was still an appreciable effect on its rainfall. Scottish weather records show that on days between 1962 and 1964 when test fallout led to higher levels of radioactive material in the atmosphere, Scotland suffered appreciably worse weather. Clouds were thicker, and on average there was 24 per cent more rain per downpour. Detonations in the Nevada Desert and on Pacific and Arctic islands lifted radioactive pollution into the stratosphere, which, as it dispersed, ionised water droplets, increasing their charge. It has long been thought that electric charge can affect the size of water droplets in clouds; now the Reading researchers are suggesting the phenomenon could be used to combat the effects of climate change. "The concept that you can inject droplets with an electrical charge could be used to address rainfall shortages in desert areas," said the report's co-author Graeme Marlton, but added: "We obviously want to steer well away from using nuclear bombs". *Times, 14 May 2020.*







# The decline of the English ghost

ALAN MURDIE contemplates recent reports of faces on buttocks and swears disembodied voices

A decline in the refinement and quality of the English ghost story has been observable for many years. In the early 1960s psychologist Nicholas Humphrey, then an undergraduate at Cambridge, heard distinguished philosopher Professor CD Broad complaining the spirit world of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was losing its colour.

“Not that spirits as such had finally gone to rest... but it seemed that these modern spirits no longer cut the dash they used to do. Their activities were becoming – dare he say it – increasingly vulgar. Only the previous day he had heard of a poltergeist which was shifting caravans around a holiday camp near Great Yarmouth.”

The location of this haunted caravan site remains unidentified, but I note a few years later in June 1971 (and three months after Broad’s own death) a disturbing presence, strange temperature drops and a feeling of being suffocated prompting a family named Dunford into fleeing Caravan B77 at Seashore Caravan Park, Great Yarmouth. (‘Straw Ghosts’ by Nicholas Humphrey in the *London Review of Books*, 7 Oct 1980; *Sun*, 5 Jun 1971; *Our Haunted Kingdom*, 1973, by Andrew Green)

Broad’s lament upon the decline of English ghost stories came back to mind this summer, when comparing a classic fictional ghost story ‘Oh Whistle and I’ll Come to You, my Lad’ (1904) by M R James with a contemporary ‘true ghost’ encounter that received national coverage in June 2020.

For those not familiar with the plot of ‘Oh Whistle’, it involves a learned professor who takes a seaside break. He discovers an ancient, inscribed whistle that he recklessly blows, sounding a note “with a quality of infinite distance in it”. Inadvertently, he summons up an evil spirit that manifests first as a gust of wind, then as a shape bobbing on the sands, and finally achieving a terrifying, full-blown physical form inside his bedchamber when it manipulates a bed sheet to create for itself a body and “a face of crumpled linen”.

This chilling fictional tale from a century ago is probably not one for sharing with 32-year-old Hollie Abraham of Helston, or her three children Skye, 11, Krystal, 10, and Alfie, seven, who believe they attracted a ghost after going to Porthoustock beach at St Keverne, Cornwall. On their return, she and her children were shocked to see in a photograph a crumpled face embossed upon the material of the back of Hollie’s



## She and her children were shocked to see a crumpled face centred on her left buttock

blue playsuit shorts, centred squarely upon her left buttock.

“Arse about face – Mum’s shock as she finds a face imprinted on her bum” was how the *Sun* breathlessly regaled its reading and viewing audience, spurring them to examine their reproduction of the image and leeringly imploring, “Can you see it?” The photographs were taken by daughter Skye, Hollie says. Like so many people who report photographic anomalies, nothing strange had been perceived when the picture was taken.

“The first one was normal, but the second one had a face on it. We didn’t

LEFT: The phantom face on Holly Abraham’s bum. BELOW: A terrifying “face of crumpled linen” manifests in M R James’s short story ‘Oh Whistle and I’ll Come to You, my Lad’.



notice until we got home. Krystal, my 10-year-old, was looking through the pictures and just said, ‘Mum, you have a face on your bum’ and I thought, ‘what are you on about?’”.

Ms Abraham declares herself “freaked out” by this; “it looks like it’s up in the playsuit and it’s facing down, it looks really weird and a bit freaky.” Her alarm intensified upon learning from a book, *The Cornwall Coast* (2008) by Arthur L Salmon, that “the beach is quite haunted because of the shipwrecks down there”, afflicted with an atmosphere of “perpetual menace”, and that St Keverne supposedly “cursed the district because of the irreligion of its people” – albeit 1,500 years ago. Imagination did the rest. Ms Abraham nervously speculated the image “could be a pirate, I could be haunted with a face of a pirate on my trousers.”

Personally, I doubt whether this is a case of ‘Permanent Paranormal Object’; hopefully just a one-off simulacrum devoid of any deeper significance or context. It doesn’t approach the received mystery of the strange collection of damaged artefacts displayed at the Piccolo Museo Del Purgatorio (The Museum of Souls in Purgatory) in the Church of the Sacred Heart of Suffrage in central Rome (FT317:74-75), or the eerie ‘Faces of Belmez’ which appeared in the floor of a house in Andalusia in the early 1970s. The focus of much wonder and controversy with specimens being claimed to change their expressions over time. (‘Are the Faces of Belmez Permanent Paranormal Objects’ by



J Tort Cesar, *Journal of the SPR* #59, 1993-94, pp. 161-71; 'Spanish eyes' by Jack Romano, **FT157:36-40**). Here one presumes the 'face' on Hollie's shorts also has the capacity to alter expression, the suggestion of an enigmatic smile breaking into a broad grin whenever she sits down...

Ms Abraham does not say what she had done with her playsuit since. In 'Oh Whistle and I'll Come to You my Lad', the animated bed sheet is burned and the evil whistle cast as far into the sea as a brawny arm could throw it. I would venture Hollie's playsuit does not need radical destruction, just the attention of a brawny arm wielding a steam iron.

If further proof of a decline in taste in spirit claims in the West Country were necessary, a story a few weeks earlier from Somerset supplied another ready example. Here the scene of the indelicate manifestation shifted inland with the *Bristol Post* (30 June 2020) announcing: "Ghostbusters have been called in over reports an angry ghoulish is swearing at tourists at a beauty spot."

Paranormal investigators Christine and Dave Thomas of South West Ghost Hunters are experimenting with recording electronic voice phenomena (EVP) at Walford's Gibbet, near Holford in the Quantock Hills. The spot is named after a Jane Walford, murdered by her husband John in 1789.

In the course of their experiments, Christine Thomas claims they were rudely told to leave by entities, being shouted at, and told to "f\*\*\* off". They attribute this to "nasty, evil spirits". Dave said: "There is definitely something there. My wife has experienced it for a long time."

Christine Thomas proposes there are "residual memories being replayed which people pick up on without being able to communicate with," being present together with "voices you can interact with, which you can have an exchange with, which can answer questions." Foul-mouthed entities are recorded in poltergeist literature, the Bell Witch (**FT359:40-49, 360:52-57**), Gef the Talking Mongoose (**FT269:32-40**), 'Donald' the Battersea Poltergeist 1956-68 and the Enfield Poltergeist (**FT32:47-48, 33:4-5** and *passim*) all resorting on occasion to sulphurous language, obscenities and blasphemy.

The Thomases maintain apparitions are also being seen locally including "a bright white figure on the side of the road" and a woman "completely dressed in white, old-fashioned clothing". One unnamed witness quoted by the *Post* avers: "I've seen what looks like a tall figure with a long dark coat on outside the pub, on the edge of the road." Regrettably, no further details are provided and with this minimal detail the proximity to a pub may encourage a reflexive scepticism.



ABOVE: The road descending to Walford's Gibbet, home to "nasty, evil" and apparently swearsy spirits.

EVP is a vexed issue where claims that these were voices of the dead have failed to live up to the expectations of researchers (see **FT104:26-30; 194:26-30; 363:30-37; 372:46-49**). However, presupposing EVP to have any paranormal causation – stray radio transmissions, misperceptions and unfettered imagination providing alternative explanations – there is no reason in principle why they should not be captured in the open air.

One of the very first supposed EVP recordings was obtained in woodlands near Stockholm in 1959 when Friedrich Jurgenson, the man credited as the 'discoverer of the voices', was engaged in recording birdsong and the calls of the Swedish finch. On playing back the tape, he heard the twittering of birds, then silence followed by a woman's voice, calling "Friedl, my little Friedl, can you hear me?"

Jurgenson considered the speaker sounded anxious and it was as if a tremendous effort had been made to produce the voice. More significantly, Jurgenson identified it as the voice of his mother who died four years earlier. Curiosity aroused, over the next few years Jurgenson recorded many more samples, obtaining what he believed were not only the voices of deceased close relatives and friends, but also those of Hitler, Goering and the US murderer Caryl Chessman executed in 1960.

Prior to this, reports of anomalous voices picked up on TVs, car radios and particularly over sets used by amateur radio enthusiasts were ascribed by some to messages from aliens (See *Road in the Sky*, 1957, by George Hunt Williamson; *Our*

*Haunted Planet*, 1971, by John A Keel).

Elements of such a notion featured in Jurgenson's own thinking. A sensitive and artistic man, he was interested in the possibilities of extraterrestrial contacts and also believed he received telepathic messages. The title of his 1964 book was *The Voices From Space (Rösterna Från Rymden)*. However, his research was overtaken by an obsessive German researcher, Dr Konstantin Raudive, to whom he took his findings in 1965. Raudive became fixated on the idea of the dead communicating electronically, their faint messages being detectable when playing back tapes and within the static of radios tuned in between broadcast channels. Raudive later boasted he had obtained 70,000 examples. In the UK his work was promoted by the Paraphysical Laboratory at Downton, Wiltshire, who published translations of his work. His tireless efforts led to the phenomenon being labelled 'Raudive Voices' for a time.

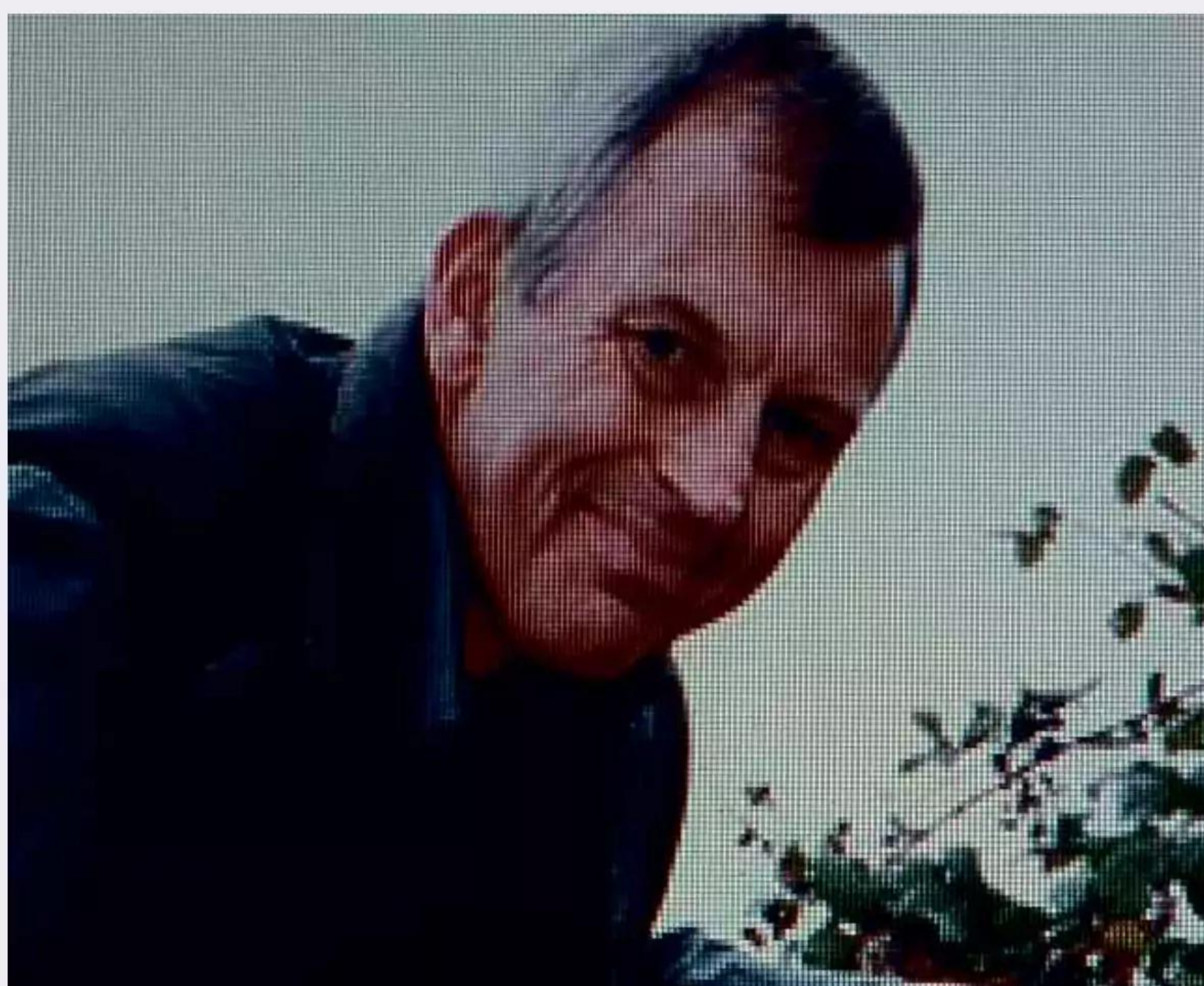
Another interesting claim came with the suggestion that other species such as dogs could detect the voices ahead of human listeners, though designing a suitable testing protocol was a challenge.

Most British ghost hunters of the period did not undergo conversion. In 1973 Andrew Green noted how "much controversy is raging as to whether they are truly paranormal, caused by psychokinesis, telepathy, auto-suggestion or some other means" One problem was that Raudive's deceased entities were mostly speaking German, if anything was being said at all. Green warned: "...before spending a lot of time and money in constructing what





# GHOSTWATCH



**ABOVE LEFT:** Friedrich Jurgenson, often called “the discover of the voices”, made what may be the earliest example of EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomena) recording in woods near Stockholm in 1959. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Rodney Legg investigated strange sounds in the outdoor environment of the West Country.

could be very expensive equipment, it should be remembered that magnetic tape recorders can easily act as radio receivers, and have been known to pick up local conversations.”

These reservations have not been recognised by many ghost hunters today, nor the conclusions of those researchers who argue the voices are misperceptions and often wholly subjective in nature (e.g. *The Mediumship of the Tape Recorder*, 1978, by David Ellis; *The Paranormal*, 1978, by Stan Gooch).

Just as clairvoyants stare into tealeaves until pictures form in the inner eye, EVP researchers listen intently to the crackling, rushing and hiss of white noise on their recordings until it turns into voices. The disjointed, banal content of many of the voices is similar to the thought patterns in dreams. But just whose dreams?

Until EVPs are unambiguously and routinely capturable using Faraday-cage shielded equipment and not heavily dependent upon subjective interpretation, cogent doubts must remain. Admittedly, it was claimed that such standards were achieved by Friedebert Karbert at the Max Planck Institute in Freiburg as early as 1964 and in laboratories in Britain in 1972; if any of these recordings survive, further analysis would be merited (See *Carry on Talking*, 1972, by Peter Bander, published in the USA as *Voices from the Tapes: Recordings from the Other World*).

And I do not discount all efforts to probe or test the possibility of perceiving strange

voices in the environment. With noise from ordinary human activity greatly reduced and many parts of the countryside deserted this summer as a result of Covid-19 restrictions, conditions were certainly favourable for experimentation.

With this in mind, on 31 July 2020 I travelled to a rather remote spot known as ‘Whispering Corner’ that lies along a woodland path near St Mary’s Church on the edge of Lytchett Matravers, a village five miles north west of Poole, Dorset. I had learned of this site from an account published by veteran local journalist and author Rodney Legg (1947-2011), who claimed personal experience of the phenomenon there. Legg detailed this in his book *Ghosts of Dorset, Devon and Somerset* (1974) co-authored with Tom Perrott and Mary Collier.

For a period during the early 1960s, Legg resided in an apartment at a decayed and now demolished mediæval manor house nearby. During his stay, Legg heard local people would avoid the church path after dark on account of voices heard about Whispering Corner. “Many times, both in daylight and after dusk had fallen,” he wrote, “I passed Whispering Corner hearing the odd whisper, taking little heed of it”.

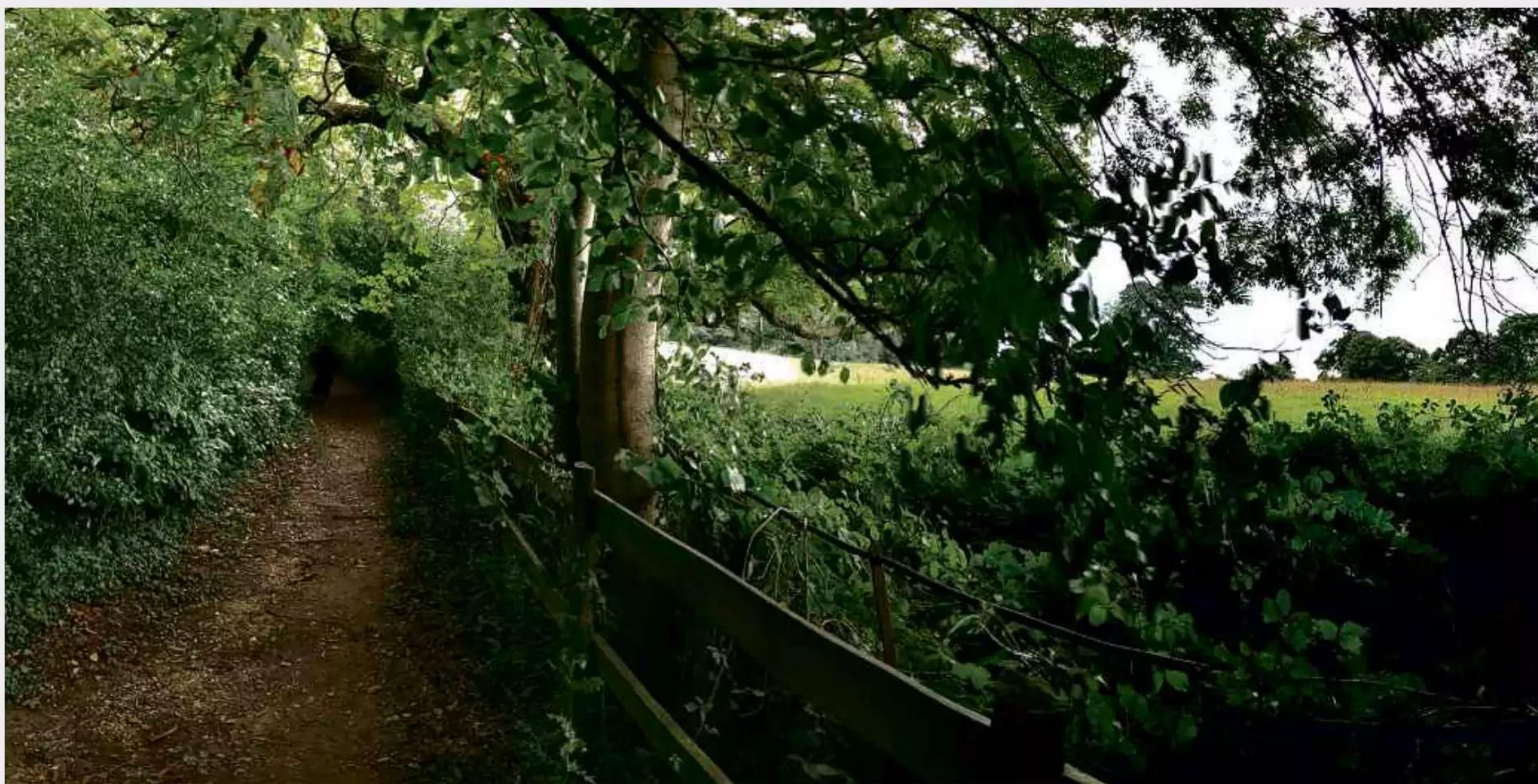
On one particular July day at “bright high noon”, Legg heard the whispering voices at the corner so plainly he thought he must be intruding upon several people. On reaching the spot, no one was visible but the whispering continued “all around rather than one from one single place,

part of the woods and the hillside itself. Voice or voices, male or female, it was impossible to distinguish. Continuous, its volume sometimes rising and falling a little, sometimes a little breathless: definitely the sound of a human voice”.

Considering normal explanations, Legg wondered if an odd echo in the bowl of the hillside or a subterranean stream could be responsible. Speculating on ghostly causes, he wondered if there was a connection with the many local victims of the Black Death. The plague had arrived through the ports of Dorset in July 1348 and decimated the population around Lytchett Matravers (this is popularly given as the reason why its church is so far from the rest of the village today after homes were abandoned).

Several years afterwards, Legg visited a friend living at Branscombe, Devon, and discussed the strange voices at Lytchett Matravers. His friend (whom I think may well have been dowser and archaeologist TC Lethbridge) told him: “We have a stream here with a water spirit... One day, a friend and I heard a voice whispering by the stream – quite a distinct whisper – and then we felt sure that the something was a water-spirit.” The field was reputedly called Pan’s Field. This led Legg to consider a manifestation of a classical *genus loci* or spirit of place to be the possible explanation for the phenomenon at Whispering Corner. Throughout antiquity, rustling forest thickets were chosen as sacred groves to venerate the rustic gods





**ABOVE AND BELOW:** ‘Whispering Corner’ lies on a quiet path near St Mary’s churchyard at Lytchett Matravers in Dorset. Rodney Legg reported hearing strange voices here on a summer’s day; the author paid a visit this year, but experienced “nothing beyond a solemn and auspicious atmosphere.”

Pan, Silvanus and the nymphs, and a host of other deities and spirits. Had he encountered the same?

Sadly, mutually busy schedules meant I was never actually able to meet Legg, but from what I have gleaned from his friends and acquaintances he was ‘a character’. An attention-seeking political activist in his youth, he mellowed and threw his dynamo energies into founding and editing *The Dorset Magazine*, writing numerous books and campaigning with the Open Spaces Society for which he served as chairman.

Legg’s experience sounds like many claimed EVP voices recorded across the years. The sound of the wind might generate a similar effect on the inner ear to that of the static hiss and white noise of sound equipment. The wind served as an inspiration to ancient poets, with nature-loving Romans such as Ovid and Virgil perceiving woods and meadows as spiritually alive (certain lines of Virgil’s *Eclogue* poems are proposed as imitating the sound of breezes in the trees).

A creative writer like Legg might have enjoyed such sensitivity himself; he was a man who certainly drew inspiration from the countryside, producing over 100 books, mostly on his beloved Dorset. Since the 1970s, parapsychology laboratories have explored the Ganzfeld technique using sensory deprivation and the playing of white noise through headphones to stimulate mental imagery and, hopefully, psi faculties.

On my own visit to Lytchett Matravers, I heard no voices or sibilant whispers



when walking the pathway up from the church to the rough-hewn bench marking Whispering Corner, nestling under towering trees. Beneath their shadows, the air felt remarkably cool for what was officially the hottest day of 2020. Nearby, over a fence and situated within private woodland, I saw the remains of what might have been an old ice house or water conduit, perhaps supporting the notion of a thermal anomaly here – Legg’s idea of an underground spring.

All around, the countryside seemed extraordinarily still and silent. In two hours, not a single wayfarer or rambler passed by. Save for one point, there seemed scarcely any breeze, but I heard nothing unusual and felt nothing strange beyond

a solemn and auspicious atmosphere. So far as I am aware, no unexpected faces appeared in any photographs taken and no supernatural terrors followed me home. But I do not rule out the possibility that more sensitive individuals might have numinous experiences here.

One who may have enjoyed such sensitivity was prolific writer and naturalist WH Hudson. In *A Hind in Richmond Park* (1922), he said he could detect within the blowing wind, “hissing, whispering, whistling, muttering and murmuring, whining, wailing, howling, shrieking – all the inarticulate sounds uttered by beast and man in states of intense excitement, grief, terror, rage and what not.”

On two occasions the blowing wind seems to have triggered remarkable hallucinations of human faces. On the first, he saw materialise the features of a teenage girl known to him, who had become estranged from her family. This disembodied face appeared floating on a southwesterly wind, one autumn evening. His second experience was two years later, in Cornwall in the month of March, when another fluttering face manifested on the wind. This time, it was a lady, “an intimate and dear friend”, then some 400 miles away. Hudson explained these as ‘phantasms’ perhaps induced by telepathy, believing the face of the girl appeared just as she prayed for his help.

Whatever their cause, at least these faces appeared to him in mid-air, not on anyone’s behind.





## ANIMAL PITCH INVADERS | Squirrels, cats, birds and an alpaca stop play in a series of unsporting disruptions



ABOVE: Oscar the alpaca goes for the tackle during Carlton Athletic's West Yorkshire Premier League game against Ilkley Town.

A football match in West Yorkshire was disrupted by an unusual pitch invasion. Carlton Athletic's West Yorkshire Premier League game against Ilkley Town was halted for 15 minutes when Oscar the alpaca escaped from a nearby farm and ran onto the field of play. After unsuccessful attempts were made to lure him off the pitch

with food, a farmer managed to shepherd him home. After the match restarted, away side Ilkley managed to win 0-2. Their manager Simon Armstrong said Carlton, between Wakefield and Leeds, was "renowned" in the league for having alpacas nearby. He described the action: "After 35 minutes it escaped, came through the entrance and

proceeded to get on the pitch. The referee stopped the game. People didn't want to go near it in case it kicked. The farmer was then called and eventually it was tempted back in the field."

Carlton Athletic chairman John Flynn acknowledged that farm animals had been kept near the pitch for years, but said this was the first time one had

managed to stop a game. "I don't know how he got out. There must be a little gap in the barrier somewhere as we've seen some chickens here as well," he said. "Oscar's really inquisitive. He was enjoying himself and running up and down the pitch – he wasn't distressed. A couple of players said he was our man of the match."

Other notable mammalian soccer interlopers include a black cat that ran onto the grass at Goodison Park during a 2019 fixture between Everton and Wolverhampton Wanderers. The feline brought no luck to the home team, who were beaten 1-3 by the visiting Wolves.

A pine marten brought chaos to a 2013 Swiss match between FC Thun and Zurich when it sprinted onto the pitch and resisted all attempts at capture, holding up the game for over five minutes. Zurich defender Loris Benito grabbed the feisty mustelid following an acrobatic 'sliding tackle' to rapturous cheers from fans. But he required medical attention after the sharp-toothed, weasel-like creature bit him and escaped again. Eventually,



JAN KRUGER / GETTY IMAGES



REUTERS / PASCAL LAUENER

ABOVE LEFT: A black cat crossed the path of Everton players during a 2019 match at Goodison Park bringing bad luck; visiting Wolverhampton Wanderers beat them 3-1. ABOVE RIGHT: A feisty pine marten took a more active part in a 2013 Swiss match between FC Thun and Zurich, sinking its teeth into Zurich defender Loris Benito.





ODD ANDERSEN / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



**ABOVE:** A squirrel invades the pitch during a Champions League semi-final between Arsenal and Villarreal at Highbury. **BELOW:** Another rogue squirrel is removed from the pitch during the Carabao Cup match between Manchester City and Wolverhampton Wanderers in 2017 in Manchester. **BOTTOM:** Karlo Isasegi celebrates a goal and then gets the bird – in this case a parrot

Zurich's goalkeeper Davide Da Costa, protected by his gloves, managed to pick up the marten and escort it off the field, to the crowd's applause. Zurich went on to win 4-0.

Squirrels appear to be drawn to cup ties. In 2017 at Manchester City's Etihad Stadium during a Carabao Cup fourth round tie against Wolverhampton Wanderers (why always them?), a bushy-tailed interloper was apparently so excited to be attending a cup game that it invaded the pitch before play had begun. Ground staff removed the intruder and City went on to beat Wolves 4-0 on penalties.

Another squirrel sought involvement in a top-level European cup game when it dashed onto the hallowed turf of Highbury in the final European football match to be played there before relocation to Arsenal's new Emirates Stadium. Arsenal were playing Spanish side Villarreal in a 2006 Champions League semi-final first leg. The speedy grey rodent used all four of its legs, running around the pitch as if on a lap of honour. Critics of Arsenal's then manager Arsène Wenger's policy of hiring only foreign players pointed out the squirrel was the only English player in the Gunners' squad. Other fans, impressed by the squirrel's pace and mobility, urged Wenger to sign it up immediately. A *Guardian* minute-by-minute match commentary showed the squirrel to have been on the pitch and in the thick of the



action for at least eight minutes:

*10 mins. we have a stalker on the pitch – a squirrel, which runs straight at Jens Lehmann. Cue chants of 'There's only one squirrel'.*

*11 mins. The squirrel has now moved to left-back, presumably thinking that it can do as good a job as Flamini.*

*18 mins. The squirrel is still running the show on the pitch, skipping away from anyone trying to mark it. The referee finally pauses the*

*game, and 'Squirrel Regis' impudently sprints to safety behind an advertising hoarding. Surprisingly, Sky haven't yet come up with the idea of Squirrel-cam.*

Birds, too, have sought fame on the football field. Recently, Karlo Isasegi, Croatian side FC Cibalia's full back, was startled when a parrot landed on his back as he was celebrating a goal. *Guardian*, 19 Apr 2006; *BBC News*, 20 Sept; *planetfootball.com*, 29 Sept 2020.

ALEX LIVESSEY / GETTY IMAGES

## BAD NEWS BEAR

Cæsar the alpaca, a long-term resident of Alaska Zoo, died after a wild brown bear tunnelled under the zoo's perimeter fence and broke into the alpaca enclosure on the night of 19 September, killing the unfortunate camelid.

Cæsar, 16, had been at the zoo for 15 years, and was popular with visitors. "He would walk up towards people and interact and sometimes spit on them if they upset him, but that's what members of the camel family do," said a zoo official. Fuzzy Charlie, another of the zoo's alpacas, was found uninjured after the attack, but, unsurprisingly, was said to be "wide-eyed and skittish".

The near-600lb (270kg) male bear was later killed after a stakeout by some dumpsters just outside the zoo fence. The bear had already been seen overturning supposedly bear-resistant dumpsters in nearby neighbourhoods over the previous week.

"It usually takes a decent-sized brown bear to flip some of these dumpsters," said Dave Battle, a Fish and Game biologist. "Typically, when brown bears start accessing trash, that becomes an elevated public safety threat." Battle was called to the zoo the next morning. By the time he got there, Fuzzy Charlie had been secured, but Cæsar's carcass had been dragged down a trail. The bear was long gone. However, that night, Fish and Game personnel and Alaska Wildlife Troopers were waiting close to the spot where it had tunnelled into the zoo. They heard the tenacious bear attempting unsuccessfully to get back inside, but couldn't see it in thick brush. The following night, a Fish and Game employee was able to take a shot when the bear returned.

Alaska Zoo is located in South Anchorage in an area backing onto Chugach State Park. Although bear sightings aren't unusual, this is the first fatal attack on zoo animals that zoo officials could recall. They plan to get another alpaca. *adn.com*, 24 Sept 2020.







## FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Horrific attacks on horses continue in France, while Alaskans are awoken by eerie noises



ABOVE: Veronique de la Brelie's horse Cimona lying injured in a ditch after it was attacked in Criquetot-sur-Logueville. FACING PAGE: FC Seoul's sex doll supporters.

### FRENCH HORSE RIPPINGS [FT397:4]



The 'barbaric' spate of French horse mutilation and killing continues unabated.

A recent attack in the Val-d'Oise Département outside Paris saw two mares slashed, one of which had its genitals mutilated and sewn together. Elsewhere, a horse was found dead in the central Cantal region. After intruders broke into a pasture in the wine-growing Côte d'Or region of Burgundy and left a horse there with a deep wound in its side, police with sniffer dogs and a helicopter combed the area, setting up road blocks. A leaked report by domestic intelligence agency SCRT stated the number of horse deaths to have exceeded 30, with around 66 per cent featuring the removal of an ear. Two recent cases involved the use of poison. The vast majority of attacks had taken place in northern France. The report

cautioned that "recent discoveries are increasingly sordid", with the perpetrators having no reluctance at "violating taboos". See also 'Strange Continent', p.24. *D.Telegraph*. 7 Sept 2020.

### DIVINE PROTECTION [FT393:6]



Israel's health minister Yaakov Litzman, head of the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael ['Union of Israel'] political party who claimed the coronavirus pandemic was divine punishment for homosexuality, before himself testing positive for the virus, has resigned in protest at a second lockdown which will coincide with the beginning of Jewish New Year and with Yom Kippur, the most important date in the Jewish religious calendar. "This wrongs and scorns hundreds of thousands of citizens," said Mr Litzman. "Why have the Jewish holidays become a convenient address for tackling the corona-

virus?" Israel's first lockdown ran from late March to early May, partially controlling the spread of the disease, but recent weeks have seen infection rates rising to 3,000 per day (in a national population of nine million). Mr Litzman had previously expressed his hope that the Messiah would come to deliver Israel from the pandemic. *BBC News*, 13 Sept 2020.

### TRIBAL TROUBLE [FT376:23]



Rieli Franciscato, a Brazilian expert on isolated Amazon tribes, has been killed by a war band from the 'Cautario River isolated group' tribe in a remote region of Rondônia state in north-western Brazil. Witnesses say Mr Franciscato and his party came under fire from the five-man army as they approached an indigenous site. Mr Franciscato, who was accompanied by police, attempted to take shelter behind a vehicle, but was struck in the chest by an arrow. A policeman who saw the incident said Mr Franciscato managed to remove the arrow, which had penetrated his chest above the heart area. "He cried out, pulled the arrow from his chest, ran 50m (164ft) and collapsed, lifeless," said the officer.

Mr Franciscato, 56, was in the area to monitor a tribe as part of his work for the government's indigenous agency, Funai. Describing him as an "excellent, serious and dedicated professional," Funai official Ricardo Lopes Dias said: "Rieli dedicated his life to the indigenous cause. He had more than three decades of service, and leaves an immense legacy for the protection of these peoples." The Kaninde Ethno-Environmental Defence Association, a group he helped create in the 1980s, said the indigenous group had no ability to distinguish between friends

or foes from the outside world. The 'Cautario River isolated group' was believed to be peaceful, but increased tension between indigenous groups and loggers may have caused their uncharacteristically warlike behaviour. *BBC News*, 11 Sep 2020.

### MORE MYSTERY SOUNDS [FT391:17]



A loud noise was heard across various parts of the Alaskan city of Anchorage during February 2020.

Described by some as "eerie" and "symphonic", it generally builds to a crescendo over 20 seconds before disappearing. It has been heard around Anchorage for years, but a sharp increase in reports were noted earlier this year.

The sound reportedly comes in bursts, becoming louder before fading away. Some witnesses heard it only once, while others heard it repeatedly for hours at a time. People miles apart reported having been woken up by the noise. "It's almost like a foghorn, and screeching metal on metal," said Anchorage resident Jamie James, who heard it at her Lake Spenard home as she was getting ready for work: "It sounds like really heavy equipment. Very heavy metal. Rusty, or needs oil".

Melissa Thompson, who went outside to record the "creepy" noise, said it was "like a submarine scraping the bottom of a pool." She first heard it four years ago, describing it as "a sound that's so internally loud" that "you feel the sound". Stephanie Quinn-Davidson, who lives near Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, thought "it sounded like underwater moaning." She says she has heard the sound many times over the years.

One Anchorage resident contacted Assemblywoman



Austin Quinn-Davidson to complain about the sound, wishing to have it logged as a public nuisance. Quinn-Davidson didn't have any answers, but admitted that she, too, had heard the noise. "Literally, I wear earplugs to sleep at night, and it woke me up," she said. "It's so loud. It sounds somewhat mechanical."

Some locals have proposed various causes for the phenomenon: snowploughs moving up and down a metal ramp; a squeaky FedEx door hinge at the airport; an electrical transformer. The snowplough explanation has been discounted, since there have also been reports of the sound during summer, and the FedEx airport door theory has been called into question due to reports several miles from the city's airport.

Other theories are that the sound is coming from the Earth, and is connected to earthquakes; some people have pointed to an alleged NASA report claiming the sounds to be naturally occurring "background" noise from the planet. But a NASA spokesman, when questioned, was unable to find a scientist at the administration prepared to address the phenomenon. However, he did refer to the late US Geological Survey scientist David Hill, who published a paper in 2011 about reports of "mystery boom" sounds. Hill suspected several culprits, from military exercises to earthquakes to "explosive offshore methane bursts".

Still others have advanced whale song, jet planes breaking the sound barrier, cold and warm air mixing in the clouds, and sounds from outer space as explanations. "I have my own theory that it could be quite possible that the human species is evolving and that is why we are beginning to hear sounds from space, maybe from other planets as they pass our orbit," wrote one contributor to the Anchorage 'sky trumpets' Facebook page. The Anchorage sound has been compared with other reports from around the world labelled "trumpets in the sky", but no wholly convincing explanation has yet been supplied. *Anchorage Daily News*, 11, 20 Feb 2020.

#### EXOTIC SUPERFAN [FT391:28-29]



South Korean professional football club FC Seoul have apologised after fans

spotted a large number of sex dolls placed in seats during a televised match against Gwangju FC. With football games being played behind closed doors due to the coronavirus pandemic, several clubs have attempted to simulate a packed stadium using mannequins. A club spokesman said the sex dolls had been ordered inadvertently as a result of a "misunderstanding" and assured viewers that the dolls "were not intended for sexual use". *Irish Times*, 19 May 2020.



AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

# MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

## 254: REMEMBER, REMEMBER



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

### The myth

Guy Fawkes, found guilty of terrorism offences, was burned at the stake. Obviously, he was – why else would the British ceremonially burn him in effigy, on a bonfire, every 5 November for the next 400-odd years and counting? Or, OK, he wasn't executed by burning, don't know where that idea comes from, but he was, surely, hanged, drawn and quartered, which was the customary punishment for treason and rebellion in those days.

### The "truth"

Guy Fawkes committed suicide. Some of you, I'm sure, are shrugging, having been aware of this since your days in short socks. But the rest of us, I have to tell you, are popping our eyes and saying: "How on Earth have I never known that before?" Following the attempt by Catholic extremists to murder England's Protestant rulers by blowing up the opening of Parliament, Fawkes, an ex-soldier from York, was among eight leading conspirators convicted of high treason and sentenced to be drawn (by a horse, to the place of execution), hanged (until almost dead) and quartered (that is, dismembered while conscious). On 31 January 1606 his colleagues met their appointed fate, but Fawkes managed to jump from the scaffold and died instantly of a broken neck. He still got quartered, but was lucky enough to be dead before it started.

### Disclaimer

Some say he didn't jump, but that his death was aided by a sympathetic hangman. Please launch corrections in the direction of the letters page.

**Sources** [www.historyextra.com/period/stuart/bonfire-night-history-facts-explained-guy-fawkes-gunpowder-plot-parliament-november/](http://www.historyextra.com/period/stuart/bonfire-night-history-facts-explained-guy-fawkes-gunpowder-plot-parliament-november/); [www.nationalgeographic.com/history/magazine/2017/11-12/history-the-explosive-truth-about-guy-fawkes/](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/magazine/2017/11-12/history-the-explosive-truth-about-guy-fawkes/); [www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/guy-fawkes-and-the-gunpowder-plot/#gs.hnpm64](http://www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/guy-fawkes-and-the-gunpowder-plot/#gs.hnpm64)

### Mythchaser

For generations now, 5 November has been a treat "for the kiddies": fireworks, baked potatoes, guys and masks. But given what it's actually commemorating, and how, we have to ask: is this a uniquely grotesque children's festival, or is there, somewhere in the world, something even more gruesome for the little ones to enjoy?





# THE CONSPIRASPHERE

**NOEL ROONEY** asks whether dissenting voices are being squeezed and even suppressed by mainstream and social media – and is this fuelling the fires of conspiracy theory?

## THE GREAT RESET AND OTHER HIDDEN THINGS

Even in societies that pride themselves on democratic values, dissenting voices have traditionally found it hard to gain a public hearing. Since the 1960s, particularly in the US and the UK, less scrupulous administrations have used the label of conspiracy theory to silence unconventional points of view or inconvenient investigations and intrusions into the workings of the power elite.

This has usually been a successful strategy, but not always. Woodward and Bernstein were called conspiracy theorists for their investigations into the Watergate affair, and not just by Richard Nixon. Bob Parry and later Gary Webb, who broke the Iran-Contra story, were called the same thing even after the story was proven to be true. But these cases are there to remind us that, at least some of the time, the truth will out.

The gradual creep of conspiracy theory into the mainstream, first as an object of ridicule and then as an area of interest, has complicated the environment for those who speak against the grain. Whereas in the last century conspiracy theory was an exotic, marginal phenomenon, an activity carried on by odd characters in odd company, it is now a topic for public consideration, and a way of thinking occasionally endorsed by some very powerful individuals.

There are two principal drivers behind this emergence of conspiracy theory from society's undergrowth into its spotlight. First, of course, is the Internet, which has made it immeasurably easier for conspiracy theorists to get their message out there, however out there their message is. Second, but no less important, is the growing



*For Schwab, the pandemic is a heaven-sent opportunity*

interest of mainstream news media in the subject; in some respects it is only natural that our media should take an interest in an activity that has grown exponentially in the age of the Internet and social media, but as I have occasionally suggested (see **FT398:20** for example), this interest sometimes appears to go beyond the mere observation of a novel cultural phenomenon.

However this situation has arisen, and whatever one thinks of it, it has, I think, put dissent in an invidious position. The current crisis around coronavirus is a good case in point. There is, clearly, an official narrative, and a relative consensus of approach to the problems caused by Covid-19; but there are arguments that contend with that narrative, and criticise the consensus approach. Not all these arguments are put forward by folks sporting tin-foil hats. In fact, some of the critics are people eminent in relevant disciplines.

But they face a double

barrier to getting their voices heard: first, the consensus is largely defended by the media (whether out of obsequious compliance or resolute propriety depends on your point of view); second, the much more visible Conspirasphere is apt to jump on even the most cautious of counter-arguments and bend it to its own (often nefarious) ends. This has the unfortunate effect of squeezing unpopular points of view into increasingly narrow spaces. The dissenters may find themselves caught between dismissive media and opportunistic conspiracists. And both those parties are liable to label them conspiracy theorists: the media because it neatly undermines the argument, and the conspiracists because it suggests the dissenters are on their side.

Another, perhaps less respectable example, is the current minor furore over the business dealings of presidential candidate Joe Biden's son, Hunter. A story surfaced in the *New York Post* recently suggesting that Hunter had procured some very lucrative, and not entirely above board, contacts and contracts in Ukraine and China; and that his father (the 'big guy' in the – inevitable – leaked emails) profited from them. Some social media platforms have shut off links to the story, and it's largely been ignored (except for straight rebuttals) in the liberal press. The Conspirasphere is all over the story like a rash, and some right-wing outlets are crying foul over the mainstream and social media response.

The story may not be kosher, and may not amount to illegality so much as old-fashioned nepotism. But as *The Intercept* (hardly an alt-right publication) has pointed out, the refusal to

engage with it by the news media, and the attempts to actively suppress it by Twitter and Facebook, are less than noble or transparent. More to the point, their behaviour has given the conspiracists a big stick to wave: they would never have buried this story if it were about Trump, right? Well, yes, actually, that's right.

Which brings us, in a roundabout way, to the Great Reset. Users of social media may have noticed this topic trending recently; it is the proposal, by Klaus Schwab (pictured above left) and his chums at the World Economic Forum, that the pandemic is actually a heaven-sent opportunity to fix our parlous economic system, get rid of cash once and for all, and perhaps indulge in a little experiment in transhumanism (Schwab is a fan).

The whole narrative, with its global aspirations and talk of immunity passports and universal basic income, might have been tailored to spur the Conspirasphere into action, especially as it's supported by a veritable gallery of their favourite hate figures (step forward, Bill Gates). But it's not only conspiracists who smell a very large rat. Many economists are deeply suspicious of the Great Reset; unfortunately, it's quite difficult to find their critical commentary without looking quite hard. One might be forgiven for thinking the powers that be don't want you to know.

**SOURCES:** <https://theintercept.com/2020/10/15/facebook-and-twitter-cross-a-line-far-more-dangerous-than-what-they-censor/>; [www.conspiracy.news/2020-10-19-hunter-biden-scrutiny-business-deals-with-chinese.html](http://www.conspiracy.news/2020-10-19-hunter-biden-scrutiny-business-deals-with-chinese.html); [www.globalresearch.ca/great-reset-revisited/5723573](http://www.globalresearch.ca/great-reset-revisited/5723573); [www.strategic-culture.org/news/2020/10/18/whose-great-reset-fight-for-our-future-technocracy-vs-republic/](http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2020/10/18/whose-great-reset-fight-for-our-future-technocracy-vs-republic/)



## ODDBALLS ONLINE | The men who point guns at their genitals, with occasionally catastrophic results, and a human ant colony on Facebook



ABOVE LEFT: A typical photo from the 'Loaded Guns Pointed at [B]enis' Facebook group; the cat looks understandably worried by this latest example of human insanity. ABOVE RIGHT: A post from the man who shot himself in the testicles. BELOW: Posts from 'A group where we all pretend to be ants in an ant colony' on Facebook tend to highlight more benign and cooperative activities.

### TRIGGERED

A member of a Facebook group in which gun enthusiasts post photos and videos of loaded weapons pointed at their genitalia has had an accidental discharge, shooting himself in the testicles. The unnamed man, from the San Diego area, has now been made an administrator or 'king' of the 'Loaded Guns Pointed at [B]enis' group, which has 1,800 (ahem) members.

"Hey [b]ois, I might have fucked up," the man wrote, above a picture of his naked legs with a towel between them and blood splatters on his carpet. He continued to post updates as he bled. "God's caliber [a .45] went through my scrotum, mattress, boxspring, and floor," he added, explaining that, at first, he thought he had only sustained a flesh wound, but that a subsequent hospital visit revealed a more serious injury. His final post, accompanied by a photo depicting him lying on a gurney wearing a green hospital gown, read: "Turns out it wasn't a graze, that round went right the fuck through me. What I thought

were two graze wounds, turned out to be an entrance and exit wound."

Basic firearm safety (and common sense) insists that one's trigger finger should always be kept away from the trigger until one is ready to shoot, and that one should always point the gun away from oneself or other

people, unless the intention is to shoot them. Members of 'Loaded Guns Pointed at [B]enis' and similar Facebook groups (there are others) delight in posting images of loaded guns pointed at their groin areas with fingers hovering just above the trigger, in order to antagonise responsible gun owners.

I FIND FRIEND  
FRIEND IS SPECIAL  
BE NICE TO FRIEND



"[We] are sick and tired of being demonised as gun owners, and looped together with the alt-right just for owning guns," explained a group administrator. "We are sick of Republicans (think NRA) telling us what to do with our property, and we are sick of being told that just because we like guns it means we have to be anti-woman, pro-life and pro Trump."

Another administrator posted an update about the injured man: "[He] is 100% okay, actually went to work the next day. The reason we are calling him king is partially because the poor guy already shot himself, don't think he needs to be chastised as well. I'm quite sure he's learned his lesson without the entire world calling him an idiot." *vice.com*, 13 Aug; *queerty.com*, 19 Aug 2020.

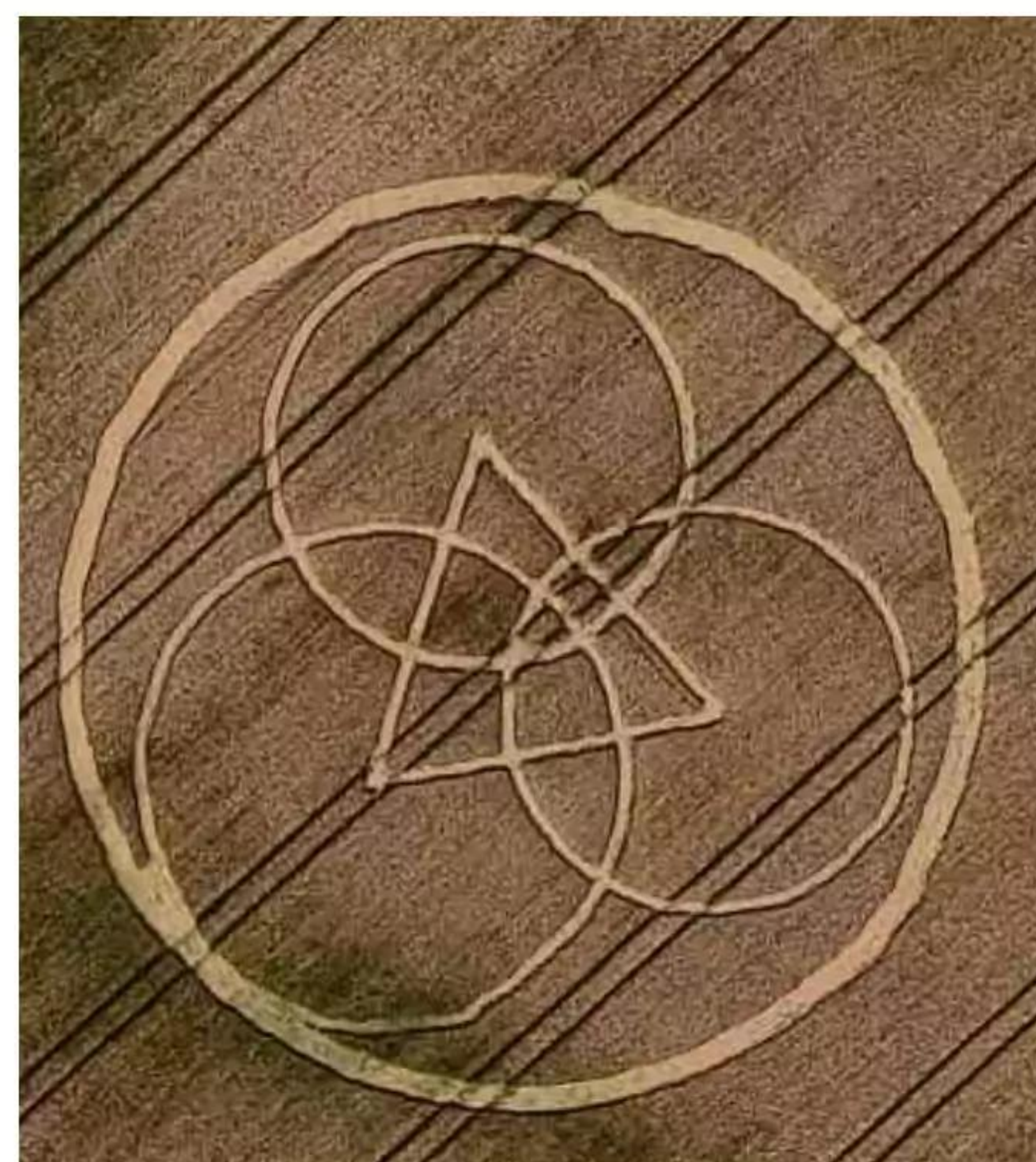
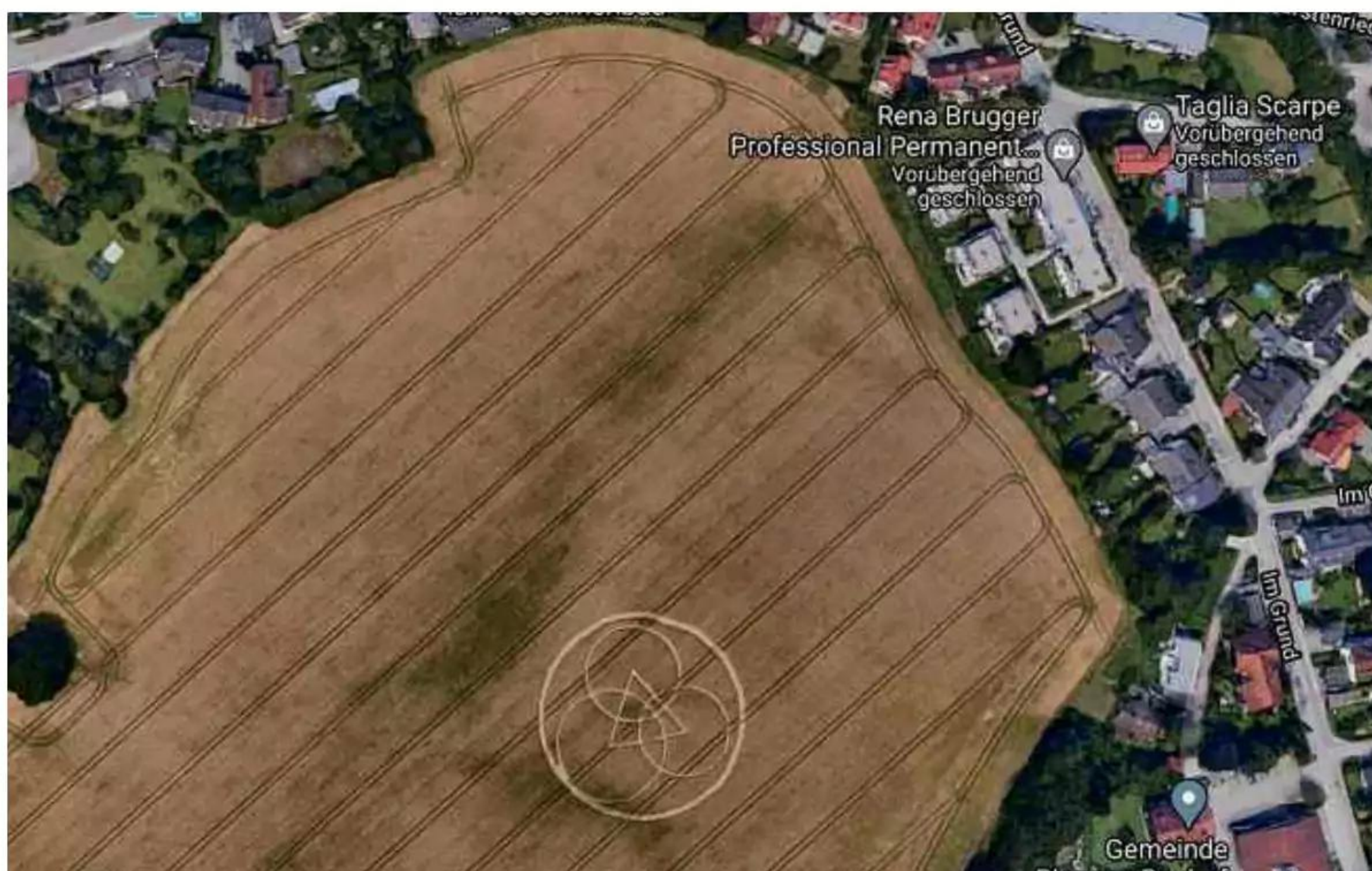
### ANTWACKY

A Facebook group in which users pretend to be an ant colony has grown to more than 1.8 million members during coronavirus social distancing and isolation. Members of 'A group where we all pretend to be ants in an ant colony' participate in various activities including crawling on food and carrying leaves. They then type commands such as "DIG," "LIFT" and "BITE" as they act out tasks in service of the colony's queen. *upi.com*, 12 May 2020.



## STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN rounds up the weirdest news from Europe, including crop circles, drones and ABCs



ABOVE: The mysterious crop circle near Planegg, Bavaria, which appeared on Google Maps – although no formation was found at the site.

### CROP CIRCLES

There were fewer crop circles on the Continent than in previous years. On 24 June, the Hallo München website published a photo from Google Maps, which showed a crop circle near Planegg, Bavaria. It consisted of an equilateral triangle intersected by three circles whose centre was at the triangles' points, all surrounded by one big circle. It was not clear when the aerial images had been taken, and no circle was to be found at the site. Google has replaced the pictures now, and no crop marks can be seen. Even the neighbours did not recall any circles in their fields, so one of the options was a photoshopped image. However, Munich computer expert Robert Helling found the photo was from July 2015 and that later downloads on the map website showed the circles becoming increasingly undefined until they were no longer visible on 29 September 2015. Helling rules out any photo manipulation.

A large crop circle appeared in the night of 6-7 May in fields close to via Carraia Bezzi, in Santerno, Romagna, Italy. It

was “perfectly symmetrical and round” and in the exact centre some burned coal was found.

At the end of June 2020 that famous symbol of the Knights Templar, the cross pattée, appeared in a field in northern France, while on 5 July another “round pattern of flattened wheat showing a cross at the centre was spotted by a local farmer in Vimy”, also in the north; it’s unclear whether these two news reports refer to the same area of flattened crops or two different formations. On 3 July, additional crop art appeared in Orchów, Poland (160ft/50m in diameter and “looking incomplete”) and between Kiskánizsa and Bajcsa in Hungary. And in late July, a giant and elaborate circle “resembling a Celtic symbol” appeared near Lake Ammer, near Munich. This coincided with the re-release of a memoir by German crop circle artist Harald Hoos, who sardonically remarked in an email: “Are both facts related? Well, that it is no miracle should be clear to all who have read this book.” As a maker of crop circles as marketing tools for various business

enterprises, Hoos certainly has form! *ravennanotizie.it*, 8 May; *n-tv*, 3 July; *wptv.com* 12 July; *mysteriousuniverse.org*, 3 July; *web.de*, 29 July 2020.

### ICELANDIC DRONE

Strange celestial sounds continue to be heard in Europe. In Akureyri, northern Iceland, a well-known fairy hotspot, people have been hearing a strange drone since 2014. On 9 August, Þorvaldur Bjarni Þorvaldsson asked on Facebook if anyone could tell him anything about the sounds. They were “recorded with a very sensitive microphone on Bjarmastígur [a street in Akureyri] last night. It is confirmed that it can be heard on Oddeyrargata, Bjarmastígur, Holtagata, Þingvallarstræti, Helgamagrastræti, by HOF, Þórunnarstræti and other places.” Musician Kristján Edelstein had also recently heard the drone: “It’s really indescribably annoying, that’s really the only word for it. It’s a persistent sound that doesn’t change pitch. The only thing I know is that I have been sleep deprived over this for two nights now.” A day later, atmospheric scientist Steven M

Battaglia suggested the sound was possibly an atmospheric effect (also a well-known explanation for UFO reports): “I looked into the atmospheric conditions at the time of the strange Akureyri noise being heard by residents. It seems that a possible temperature inversion in the atmosphere occurred at the time the noise was heard.” *grapevine.is/news*, 12 +13 Aug 2020.

### ATTACKS ON ANIMALS

As was reported recently in these pages (see **FT397:4** and p22), there has been an outbreak of horse ripping across northern France, where at least 10 killings have taken place since February 2020 in the *départements* of Moselle, Yvelines, Aisne, Somme, Seine-Maritime, and Oise. In mid-September, a man was arrested in France and accused of having killed three horses (and attacked even more) at Villefranche-Saint-Phal, south of Paris, in late August. All in all, more than 150 mutilations were recorded from about half of all French *départements*. *netzwerk-kryptozoologie.de*, 14 Sept 2020.

Other horse hate crimes





occurred in Belgium ([mysteriousuniverse.org](http://mysteriousuniverse.org), 15 Aug 2020) and Germany in the region of the Rhine. Between June and mid-August, five horses around Heidelberg were cut with knives; on the night of 27-28 July, three horses were wounded in several villages around Heddesheim and Neckargemünd, near Heidelberg, receiving rectal, genital and shoulder cuts; and on the night of 13-14 August, three mares were stabbed in the legs near Wiesloch. Witnesses described a tall, 50-year-old man in a white T-shirt as possible culprit. Some of the many incidents were later reviewed by police to establish whether these were genuine cases of deliberate mutilation or whether the injuries rose from natural causes. *RNZonline*, 29 July; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 Aug; *Mannheimer Morgen*, 18 Aug 2020.

At Dauernheim, Hesse, three horses were severely wounded by dogs at the end of July, but it was suggested that perhaps the dogs had been ordered to attack by their owner. *Kreis-Anzeiger Wetterau*, 29 July 2020.

In Graz, Austria, someone police described as a “psychopath” caught and skinned two cats with “precise cuts”. Psychiatrist Manfred Walzl was concerned; most serial killers start out as animal torturers. *kurier.at*, 20 July 2020.

## GERMAN ABC SIGHTINGS

Big cats still roam Europe – a black panther was spotted in August by a woman from her balcony in Obing, near Traunstein, Germany. She quickly informed the owner of the neighbouring wildlife park, who checked but found no big cat missing; he in turn informed police, who could find no trace of the beast, but asked hunters in the region to check their wildlife cameras for any unidentified images. This also drew a blank, and the police explanation was that the woman had mistaken a wild boar for a big cat. Elsewhere in Germany, there were



several sightings of a large cat in Brandenburg in May, and Bob Skinner has informed me of sightings of lynx in southern Hesse in September. *nordkurier.de*, 20 May; *www.br.de*, 14 Aug 2020.

## OUT-OF-PLACE ANIMALS

Big cats were not the only out-of-place animals spotted across Europe. All kinds of other creatures were seen, including several crocodiles and some completely bizarre animals. Some were escapees from zoos and farms, like the porcupine seen in a gravel pit at Donauwörth (*Abendzeitung*, 13 June 2020) or the panda which escaped from its cage at Copenhagen Zoo (*Augsburger Allgemeine*, 8 June 2020).

But what was the “animal very much like a pony” seen standing by the A 40 motorway near Moers, Germany, on the morning of 18 July? The local police at Wesel received “many calls” warning them that an animal that was hard to describe had crossed the road

in front of motorists, and posed a danger to traffic. One caller said it “partly resembled a pony”. Police investigated and found it was a Kangal – a large breed of shepherd dog. They gave the excited pet a dish of water to help it cool down. *derwesten.de*, 18 July 2020.

Crocodiles were spotted near Jever and Jork, both in northern Germany, and in the river Unstrut in Hesse. In the first case, police retrieved a rubber foam croc head from the sighting area. In the Unstrut, searches (and dead chickens hanging on fishing hooks) failed to lure the beast from the river. Radio controlled model crocodile heads have become fashionable in Germany, which may well explain the sightings. *Tag24*, 14 July; *web.de*, 1 Sept; *General-Anzeiger, Bonn*, 12 Sept 2020.

And then – a penguin. A Pillig woman called police on 12 July to say that she had seen and photographed a penguin on the roof of her daughter’s house in the Eifel Mountains

near Koblenz. She wondered where it came from (and I wondered what it was doing on the roof), as no circus was anywhere nearby. Police asked her to send an email with the picture and handed it over to ornithologists at the wild bird sanctuary in Kirchwald. The experts there thought it was a gull, while members of the German Network for Cryptozoology came down in favour of a smaller songbird. *rhein-zeitung.de*, 19 July 2020.

## RECORD METEORITE

The largest meteorite ever found in Germany was only confirmed this July by geologists. In 1989, gardener Hansjörg Bayer of Blaubeuren, Swabia, came upon a large stone while digging. He used it as a garden ornament for 25 years before storing it in a closet. He had always felt there was something special about his find, and this year decided to show the 30.26kg (67lb) stone to meteorite expert Dieter Heinlein from the German Centre for Air and Space travel (DLR). Heinlein thought that the stone must have fallen between 100 to 1,000 years ago. He said people often sent him strange stones they had found, but that he had come across just three authentic meteorites in the 2,000 he had received. *Welt.de*, 17 July 2020.

## HEADS-UP

A 43-year-old worker on a bin lorry in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, alerted police when he found a severed human head amidst the refuse on 29 July. He had made his round, emptied the lorry, and took a photo of the resulting garbage pile on which he later noticed the head. He immediately informed police who investigated. Searching 10 tons of rubbish – they found a deceptively real-looking model silicone head. *Web.de*, 29 July 2020.





## NECROLOG

The man whose cache of hidden riches attracted thousands of adventurers, and indirectly caused at least five fatalities, heads off to find treasures in Heaven...



ABOVE: Forrest Fenn in his New Mexico home, surrounded by some of the artefacts in his large collection.

### FORREST FENN

Forrest Fenn was a decorated Vietnam veteran and millionaire art dealer. Born in Texas in 1930, Fenn joined the US Air Force after leaving school. He spent nearly 20 years in the force, becoming a major and serving as a fighter pilot in Vietnam, where he flew 328 combat missions in 365 days, and was awarded the Silver Star. Returning to Texas, he became an art dealer. By 2014, he was grossing around \$6million (£4,750,000) a year, reputedly by dealing in an eclectic variety of pieces, including Indian artefacts, Western paintings and bronzes. He was said to openly sell Modigliani, Monet and Degas forgeries, asking: “If you love it less when you see the signature, who now is the fake?” Fenn claimed to have sold to “movie stars and politicians, to the rancher and the farmer”. His customers were said to include Ronald Reagan, Jackie Onassis, Robert Redford and Steven Spielberg.

But he achieved fame of a different, and some might say

questionable, nature after his best-selling memoir *The Thrill of the Chase*, published in 2010, indirectly led to the deaths of at least five people. [see FT395:10; FT398:23] Fenn claimed to have concealed a treasure chest somewhere in the Rocky Mountains, filled with gold coins, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, diamonds, and antiquities, and with an estimated value of between \$2 to \$5 million. His autobiography describes his Texan childhood, 20 years’ service in the US Air Force, being twice shot down over Vietnam and in 1988 being told he had three years to live following a renal cancer diagnosis. A cryptic poem at the end of the book would, he claimed, reveal the location of the treasure if correctly decoded.

Fenn, an outdoorsman who loved nature, said he had been inspired to create the treasure hunt after his cancer diagnosis. “We’re an overweight society,” he once said. “So I wanted to get the kids away from their electronic gadgets... and out into the sunshine, out into the

mountains, hiking, fishing, picnicking – anything but the couch. Get out of the game room.”

An estimated 100,000 people attempted to crack the code and find the treasure, searching Western states from New Mexico to Montana. The first fatality came in 2016 when a 54-year-old man disappeared in near-zero temperatures. To assist his quest, he had moved from Florida to Colorado to be near the Rocky Mountains. His skeletal remains were discovered a year later. A 53-year-old was the next to die, in 2017, falling down a steep slope in Yellowstone National Park. A week later, the body of a 52-year-old pastor was found by the Rio Grande River days after he had told his family he

was searching for the treasure. Later that year, a 31-year-old who had moved to the Rockies in search of the chest was found dead beside Colorado’s Arkansas River. And in 2020, another 53-year-old man was found dead in a remote area near Dinosaur National Monument, the vast nature reserve spanning Utah and Colorado.

Commenting on the deaths, Fenn said: “It’s tragic and heart breaking... I certainly didn’t anticipate anyone was going to get killed.” Officials urged him to remove the chest and bring an end to the obsessive and dangerous treasure hunts. “I would implore him to stop this nonsense,” said a New Mexico state police chief after investigating one of the 2017 deaths. But Fenn refused, saying: “Searchers have spent money and vacation time looking for the treasure, and I don’t feel I could do that, even if I wanted to.” Instead, he suggested searchers use common sense.

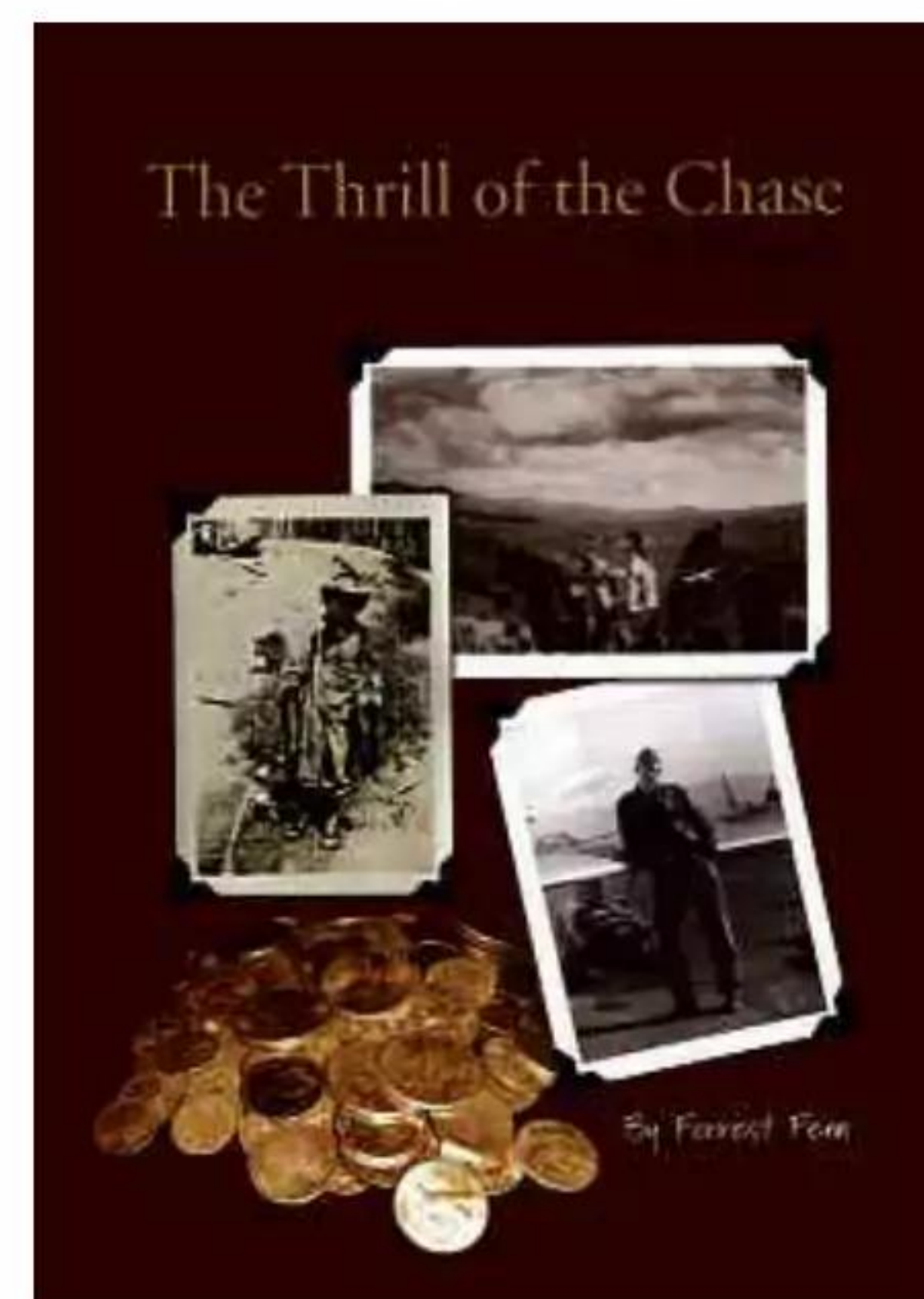
“Don’t look for the treasure any

place where a 79-year-old couldn’t have taken it,” he advised. “I never said it was buried. I hid it.”

As time went on, more and more obsessive searchers fell by the wayside; apart from the fatalities, others moved house to be

nearer the supposed treasure location, resigning from their jobs and spending their life savings; marriages broke up, and lawsuits were filed by disappointed seekers. Critics began to suggest the entire thing had been a hoax.

British filmmaker Tomas Leach, who spent time with







Fenn in 2014 while making *The Lure*, a documentary about the treasure hunt, recalled being amazed by Fenn's mansion, which he described as a "museum-slash-lair" stuffed with American Indian artefacts, Persian rugs and rare antiques. "He's very opinionated and mischievous, but was also very warm, patient, and kind to me," said Leach. "He likes the story that's wrapped up in things, including himself."

Some more charitable commentators suggested that Fenn wished to show people that treasure lay "in their hearts" and in the beauty of the American outdoors. The sceptical argued that he was in cahoots with Rocky Mountain tourist boards in order to increase visits to the region, something that his cryptic poem certainly achieved.

Finally, in early June 2020, Fenn told a Santa Fe newspaper that a man from "back East" had recently located the treasure, sending him a photograph of the chest, but allegedly asking that his identity, the photograph, and the location of the treasure not be revealed. This vagueness only served to increase suspicion regarding the treasure and whether it had been found or not, or even if it had ever existed.

Fenn later released photographs that showed him examining the chest and its contents, possibly on or near the site where it had allegedly been found. Some critics then queried the date of these photographs; had they been taken in 2020, or 10 years earlier when the chest had apparently first been concealed? The inconclusive climax to the treasure hunt led one magazine article to observe that "the search for Forest Fenn's treasure has finally come to a mysterious and possibly suspicious end."

Fenn is survived by his wife Peggy, née Proctor, who he married in 1953, and by their two daughters.

*Forrest Fenn, author and art dealer, born Temple, Texas, 22 Aug 1930; died Sante Fe, New Mexico, 7 Sep 2020, aged 90.*



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

### THE NIGHT VISITORS

Forteana and folklore are strongly connected to sleep. Ghosts walk down corridors while residents hide under duvets; aggressive polts pull sheets from over and even under sleepers. Aliens have, of course, perfected early morning visits, with abductions frequently beginning in the bedroom.

The first volume of the *Fairy Census* and the second, which I'm now slowly getting ready, are full of night-time encounters. Sleepers awake to see the fey in various unusual poses: armies, wagon trains, dance companies... Telepathic communications are associated with dreams. Going back in history, demons assaulted the faithful while they slept: there was, as with some modern alien reports (and the occasional fairy account), often a sexual element. Witch attacks, too, took place at night. Indeed, there were men and women who were executed because of what looks like the evidence of dreams: 'I woke and found her by the foot of my bed...'

What do we do with this material? Do we just reject it wholesale as evidence for forteana? Well, there is no question that sleep is wrapped up with a mess of psychological and physiological states. There are hypnagogic visions, had as the sleeper goes under. (I frequently hear random voices as I am drifting off to sleep or hear loud explosions: apparently a common experience.) We have

all had the sudden falling sensation when we enter sleep. Some readers will have suffered from 'the hag' (aka sleep paralysis): you can't move; you often feel or see an evil presence; and this is typically associated with a crushing weight on your back or chest. There are, particularly among the young, night terrors. In the morning, hypnopompic states mean that,

for some dreamers, REM sleep and waking blur with dramatic consequences: 'As I rubbed my eyes, I saw a giant lobster walking through the door...'

It doesn't take much imagination to see how all of these could become life-changing moments. Listing these conditions or experience types will give you a sense of why some fortean researchers rule out anything that happens in bed. Are they right to? It all depends, I suppose, on whether the role of an anomalist is to study the truth of fortean phenomena or, much

more modestly, to study fortean experiences. If you are a cowardly pragmatist like me, limiting your work to the latter, then the bedroom becomes perhaps the most important fortean laboratory we have – one with lessons for experiences in the wider world. Nor does this mean we negate the truth of experiences. A physiological or psychological quirk may explain why I see my dead grandmother as I stagger to the bathroom at midnight. It does not mean that she is not there.

Simon has edited *Sheridan Le Fanu's Scary Fairy Tales: Four Tales of Fairy Horror* (2020).

IS THE ROLE OF  
AN ANOMALIST TO  
STUDY THE TRUTH  
OF PHENOMENA  
OR TO STUDY  
FORTEAN  
EXPERIENCES?



# HELLCATS

## THE DEMONISATION OF THE DOMESTIC FELINE

In an exclusive extract from her forthcoming new book (as dictated to **PAUL KOUDOUNARIS**), **BABA THE CAT** traces the tragic fate of her proud species as the dawn of a new religious faith saw the descendents of *Felis silvestris lybica* transformed from gods and helpers of humankind to demonic enemies of the Church. Photos of Baba by Paul Koudounaris.

**A**ll species have had a hand – or claw or hoof, as the case may be – in shaping history. Each has its own storied past, and all of them are incontrovertibly connected. This fact is at its most certain when it comes to cats and humans, because the historical connection between us is as intimate as any. We stood at your side at the very dawn of civilisation. Raised by your hands to the thrones of the gods, we witnessed from on high your greatest glories. We marched with you through the passage of time and migrated to exotic lands. And we stand at your side still to this very day.

We cats have been allies to humankind for a very long time, and while you have reserved the sobriquet “man’s best friend” for the dog, archaeological evidence offers hints that felines have been your companions for as long if not longer than canines; or to put it this way, the partnership between cats and humans is older than currency, older than man’s use of metals, and older even than written language. It dates to the very foundation of civilisation itself, and we might reasonably argue that without our assistance, your civilisation might not have gotten very far. Human pride is such that you assume this is bluster on my part. But consider the view of your great ancestors in the matter, being so thankful for our presence that they believed us to be representatives of deities. In the glory days, humans and cats together marched from the humblest of beginnings to heights undreamt.

But those who think our lives are nothing but comfort will find that we have endured



### Jesus Christ had never, in the stories of his life, shown one whit of animosity toward cats

calumnies beyond what any species has known. The hands which raised us high would later cast us back down to the pit of our greatest despair. I will not for the sake of good manners hide the truth of our sorrows and tribulations, and I don’t imagine you yourself will be unscathed by the accounting...

### CATS AND CHRISTIANS

All was as it should be, and as it had been for millennia, as a friendship born in the mists of prehistory had grown into a longstanding partnership defined by love and respect. We cats had been universally recognised as mankind’s closest friend, and rested upon a perch that we had every reason to believe was unassailable.

Oh, how wrong we were.

Our perch crumbled from under our paws, and when we fell, we plummeted to depths we never could have imagined. Perhaps domestication had come at the expense of our wiles. We had trusted too freely in mankind, and were wholly unprepared when humans turned on us with a wrath they had previously reserved for their mortal enemies. And to this betrayal, we had no

recourse. Having adapted over thousands of years to life among you, we could not simply return to the wild. Trapped in your cities, we looked in horror as the faces in which we had once seen love became contorted with rage. “But what of *Felis*?” we pleaded. “What of the partnership that had been formed, and has for so long served human and feline in equal measure?”

The culprit was a new faith, although hardly would this have raised any alarm at first – we had, after all, lived in harmony with humans of any number of faiths in any number of lands. And certainly this faith seemed innocent enough. It had come from the Middle East, the very place where the alliance between cats and people had been formed, and based on the teachings of a









prophet, Jesus Christ, who had never in all of the stories of his life shown one whit of animosity toward cats.

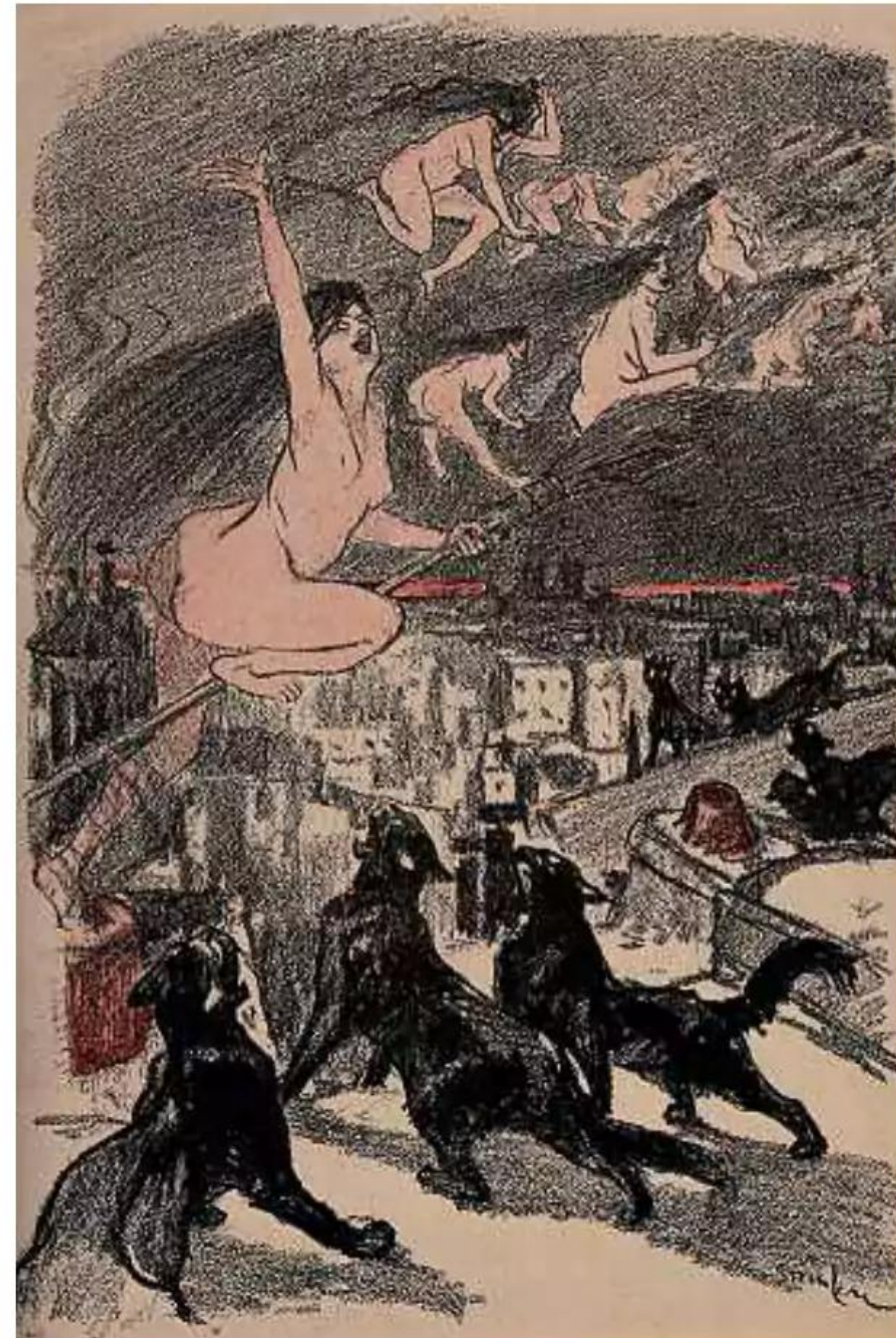
By the late fourth century, however, when their triumph was near at hand, the Christians decided they did not wish for their faith to coexist with those of the Ancients. The Old Ways did not sit well with them. Belief systems that had inspired some of humanity's finest accomplishments were now judged to be the work of the Devil, and anything associated with the Pagan world was considered suspect. The goddesses with whom we had stood for centuries were suddenly reviled as demons, and we as their companions were as reviled as well. It was a topsy-turvy new world, and since the Pagans had held us up in esteem, the Christians determined to cast us down low.

But even as they disparaged us, they didn't strip us of our powers, as they believed all too well in the magical abilities bestowed upon us by the Pagans. Instead, they turned them about so as to stigmatise us even further. Our power to protect became a power to curse, and what had once been foresight now became the eyes and ears of the Devil himself. Black cats became especially vilified. The Pagans had considered them to be the most esteemed, so they must be the ones most favoured by the Dark Lord. And didn't the colour of their coats admit as much? Black as the deepest night to signify their connection to evil, they were creatures of the netherworld and bringers of bad luck.

By the Middle Ages, it was said we were in service to the Devil. We acted as his

little spies, stealthy, clever, and always on the lookout. And in the still of night, we summoned Him, the cries of cats in heat being now mistaken for calls to beckon our Infernal Overlord to appear in our midst.

But these were piddling offenses compared to... stealing souls? Indeed. The old belief that we could act as soul houses had also been perverted into a wild notion that at the moment of passing, a cat might appear from the shadows to abscond with the deceased's soul in order to ferry it to Hell and condemn a good Christian to eternal torment. And so the accusations went, paranoid ramblings that might seem laughable in any rational age. But this was



LEFT: Witches with their familiars, reproduced in *The Devil in Britain and America*, 1896. BELOW: Black cats howl as naked witches fly over the city in a *fin de siècle* print by TA Steinlen.

an age of a different type, and the paranoid superstitions were codified as doctrine by the 13th century, when the highest authority in Christendom, Pope Gregory IX, officially condemned us as vessels of the Devil and enemies of God.

## FAMILIAR ACCUSATIONS

By adding magic and overt sexuality to the basic package of sacrilege heretics had already been accused of, the witch became a sensation, something considerably more than the sum of her parts. And cats? Oh my, yes, we were the ideal complement. Both witch and cat were creatures of the night, and considering our longstanding connection to magic it was a sure bet that we were somehow linked to her powers. Some accounts even claimed that the Devil



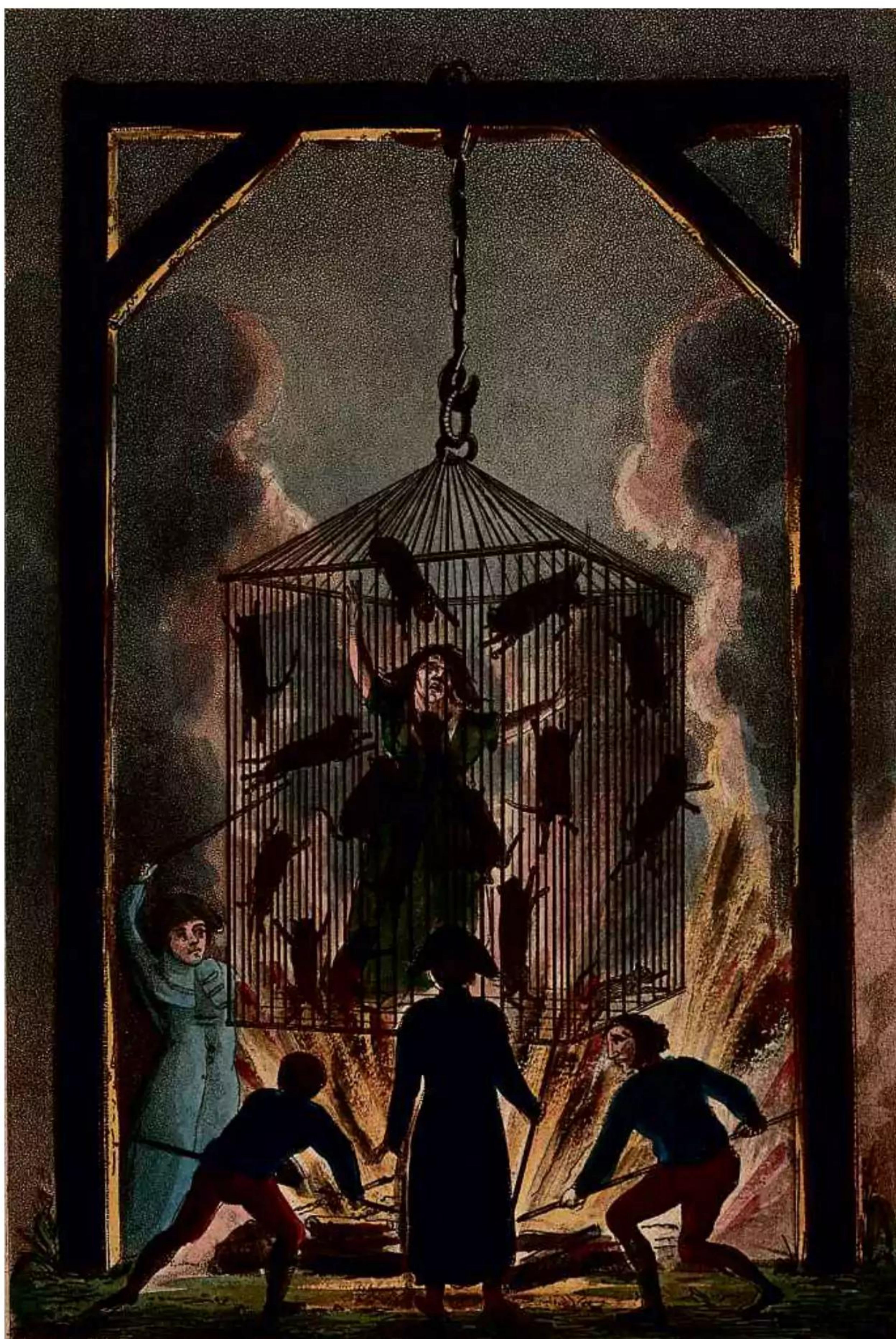
appeared at her sabbaths not in the form of a goat or ram, but as a large tomcat. A perfect pair: cat and witch. Like two forces of evil operating in tandem, one incomplete without the other, but together magnifying the threat each posed to the Christian world.

Given such a build-up, many of the accusations involving felines and witches seem a bit prosaic, being no more than recycled charges from the war against heresy. We're talking about simple matters that all cat owners must attend to; you're familiar with the daily tasks, no doubt – things like sacrificing infants in our honour, participating in unholy congregations, and kissing under our tails. But the witches were also brewing up something new on those dank and sinister nights under the blood-red Moon. Cats were becoming intimately bonded to them in a way we had never been with heretics. When it came to witchcraft, we were cast as familiars, extensions of the body and power of the witch herself.

This was according to the Devil's own plan, he having devised the role of familiar so that we could give special assistance to his army of hags. There were advantages to our small size and stealth, as we could go unnoticed in places where a woman could not, and thereby provide a discreet set of eyes and ears. But that was the least we had to offer, since we were believed to have our own magical talents. By communing with our matron, we could augment her powers, and snippets of our fur or claws could be used to make potions, which provided the witch with abilities as varied as clairvoyance, invisibility, and weather control.

And did you know that a witch could even adopt her familiar's form? Imagine the havoc she could wreak, as with her identity thus disguised she could roam freely and cause whatever mischief her black heart desired. As if a cat's life wasn't difficult enough in those days, this new delusion led to a particularly loathsome belief that witches could be unmasked by inflicting injuries on suspicious felines. The idea was that one might attack the cat, and if a local woman was found the next day to have a wound on her body in a corresponding place, her status as a witch was thereby confirmed. Ah, yes, yet another danger to look out for, and yet another impetus to avoid humans entirely.

Europe's demonologists declared that affairs were even worse than anyone had guessed, since cats were, in addition, at great risk of being possessed by demons. Well! How was that left out of *The Exorcist*? As ridiculous as the charge now sounds, back in the day it was understood that demons could possess all manner of creatures, and of the entire animal kingdom it was we who were most amenable. In the demented logic of the time it made sense. We served the Devil, after all, so why wouldn't we be delighted to offer our bodies to his minions?



**ABOVE:** The burning of Louisa Mabree, a French midwife accused of witchcraft, in a cage filled with black cats suspended over a blazing fire.

## Pope Gregory IX condemned us as vessels of the Devil and enemies of God

We were simultaneously at the height of our powers and the depths of our despair, helpless to protect ourselves despite the potent abilities your kind believed we possessed, and punished all the more for them. Our crimes might include no less than murder, and numerous were the witches who

admitted to having set cats to that very task. Of course, these were women who had been tortured to breaking point and were ready to acquiesce to any confession that might bring even a moment's respite from the rack. But credible or not, their testimony confirmed the zeal to believe, heightening further still the vitriol directed against us.

If you think it could get no worse, guess again. A banner year in the history of feline devilry came in 1484, when the Vatican proclaimed us to be as culpable for the evils of sorcery as the witches themselves and decreed that we should be burned alongside them. From then on, any cats sharing the home of a suspected witch would share the ignominy of her fate. And if the accused had no cat? She had better come up with one and quick, lest the inquisitors disbelieve her

WELLCOME TRUST



# THAT DEMON CAT.

Mysterious Thing That Continues to Haunt the People of Richfield Center, O.

A special to the Cleveland Plain Dealer from Toledo, O., says: Additional details from the bewitched community of Richfield Center were brought to this city today by Henry Niemen, which fully corroborate the strange story told by A. M. Miller yesterday. Whatever the cause, the whole town, or at least the larger German element in the village, is as thoroughly stampeded as a drove of wild cattle.

## GOLDEN BULLET FOR CAT.

Remarkable Animal Now Hunts With the Dogs and the Hens on the Place Just Crow Like Roosters, the Farmers Say.—To Meet Today.

Pottsville, Pa., Sept. 29.—The question of whether the "hex" cat, which is alleged to have cast a fatal spell over Howell Thomas, who was buried here this week, and to have turned things in general upside down on his farm, shall succeed is driving the Thomas family altogether off the old homestead in the Tumbling Run valley, is agitating the farmers for miles around that locality. Yesterday the "hex" farm was the mecca of big crowds of curiosity seekers.

## 'HEX' CAT WORRIES SCHUYLKILL COUNTY

Weird Tales of Hard Luck Follow Sensational Declaration by Miss Thomas.

So much agitated are the people of lower Schuylkill County that it is now a common saying that that section of the State is "fer-hexed," or more or less under the spell of the "hex," said to influence the fortunes of the family of the late Howard Thomas of the Tumbling Run Valley.

Since Miss Mary Isabella Thomas made her sensational statement several weeks ago, many farmers have been complaining of hard luck. Crops which have not been successful have been referred to as "fer-hexed," and not a few have even looked for the presence of an evil "hexameter" black cat or other uncanny visitors about their premises.

In the towns, where people had laughed to derision the strange and weird tales told of happenings on the Thomas farm, the "hex" cat is a veritable byword.



LEFT AND FACING PAGE: Newspaper accounts of the Ohio demon cat (*Buffalo Evening News*, 25 Jan 1897); the Pennsylvania 'hex' cat (*Lebanon Courier*, 3 Oct; *Allentown Democrat*, 10 Oct 1911); and the demonic cat of Washington DC (*Parsons Daily*, 7 Dec 1898).

confession. Any cat she could think of might be implicated, even local felines roaming the streets and scarcely of her acquaintance. But I will place no blame upon these tormented souls for testimony that caused untold further deaths of my kind. They were victims of the same perversion of faith as us, driven to madness as their whole reality was reduced to excruciating pain. Relief would come, but only in the form of death, as the witch and whatever unsuspecting cats she named as accomplices were together bound and condemned to the flames.

Think now of the cruel irony: it was older, unmarried women looking for companionship who were the most likely to show us compassion. Ah, you know the kind! You joke about them now as crazy cat ladies – but back then it was no joke. As a group, they were forced to the margins of society, where their gender and lack of status rendered them defenceless against charges of witchcraft. And once accused, the very goodness of their hearts, as evidenced by their charity toward local felines, was turned against them. A suffering animal and a lonely human, a pair of outcasts each offering the other a modest measure of comfort in a wicked world, saw an offer of

love turned into a death sentence for both. Can an age be darker than to exchange kindness for murder?

Humans change their attitudes *verrrrry* slowly, and many of you stubbornly clung to the idea that we were evil well into the 1800s, and in some areas even longer. Only a century ago, people in remote parts of Europe still circulated stories about witches transformed into cats. Or tales of an evil cat king who ruled over the rest of us, appearing as a run of the mill feline by day, but at night... ah, well, that was when he exerted the Devil's powers, and people had best be wary if they ventured out after dark, since no one could say where he might be hiding...

### DEMON CATS IN THE US

By the late 19th century, the belief in demonically possessed cats even managed to cross the Atlantic. One was accused of plaguing Richfield Center, Ohio, in 1897, and while that town managed to slip from the Devil's paws, soon enough it was the turn of Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania, to face the evil (cat's) eye. It started innocently enough on the face of things, when a local mama cat gave birth to a litter. But the



residents were no bumpkins and they knew something was amiss. They noted the date – being the sixth day of the sixth month of the year 1906 – and what’s more, there were exactly six kittens born and the sixth one happened to be black. That’s an awful lot of sixes, and if you add them all up you get no less than the Number of the Beast. The prophecy appeared to be fulfilled when a large black cat suspected of being either a disguised witch or the Devil himself began appearing at night, prowling around local farms. Word spread of sinister doings: it was said that the hens started to crow like roosters and the pigs barked like dogs when it was near. The climax came when the owner of the property on which the kittens had been born died suddenly. The coroner could not determine the cause, but the locals had no doubts that the “Hex Cat”, as they now called it, had lain the man low. Poses were formed and went to the forest in search of this unholy foe. Their rifles were loaded with bullets cast of melted gold – an expensive indulgence, but apparently effective, because even though none of their shots hit the mark, the cat ran off and was not seen again. The townsfolk explained that the diabolic feline had been scared off by the power of their faith. Or, alternately, might we conjecture that an otherwise normal stray cat hit the road in search of a town where it wouldn’t be shot at by hillbillies?

But these goings-on were scarcely a ruckus compared to the wickedness afoot in Washington, DC. It was there, more than a thousand years after we were first cast as the Devil’s minions, that the most feared of all demonic cats was finally summoned forth from the pit – meaning in this case the basement of the US Capitol Building. With its dome under construction in the 1850s, the Capitol was left open to an influx of vermin. Before you quibble about whether the term might refer to the elected officials, let me state categorically that I refer to an invasion of rats. Feral cats were collected and released into the basement to combat them, but within a decade, a very different sort of cat was claimed to be prowling the halls.

The apparition was black as pitch, but generally appeared at first sight no different to an ordinary domestic feline, and would not have caused undue alarm save for the matter of its glowing red eyes. These proved a portent of further devilment, and the cat grew larger and more menacing as it returned over a series of nights until, with fangs gleaming and claws glistening, it took on the form of a ferocious panther. As terrified maintenance staff spread word that a monster had come, the terrible spectre just as mysteriously disappeared. It then reappeared some months later, only to disappear and reappear again and again in a terrifying game of hide-and-seek.

Rumours began to circulate, and they did not tell of the quantities of moonshine whiskey or whatever other swill might be quaffed by bored night staff in order to induce such visions. Rather, they told of

## CAPITOL SPECTERS.


### Fifteen Mysterious Forms Seen About the Great Building.

Watchman and Other Employees Tell  
Peculiar Stories About Uncanny  
Doings at Night—Demon Cat  
and Her Escort.

According to the Washington correspondent of the Chicago Inter Ocean, the demon cat has reappeared at the capitol, spreading terror among the employees. The capitol is most prolific in such apparitions, no less than 15 ghosts claiming it as their heritage. But of them all the demon cat is the most horrible. It possesses much more remarkable features than any of the others, inasmuch as it has the appearance of an ordinary pussy when first seen, and presently swells up to the size of an elephant before the eyes of the terrified observer.

The demon cat, in whose regard testimony of the utmost seeming authenticity was put on record 35 years ago, has been missing since 1892. One of the watchman on duty in the building shot at it then, and it disappeared. Since then, until now, nothing more had been heard of it, though one or two of the older policemen of the capitol force still speak of the spectral animal in awed whispers.

One of the most curious and alarming of the audible phenomena observable in the capitol, so all the watchmen say, is a ghostly footstep that seems to follow anybody who crosses Statuary hall at night. It was in this hall, then the chamber of the house of representatives, that John Quincy Adams died—at a spot indicated now by a brass tablet set in a stone slab, where stood his desk. Whether or not it is his ghost that pursues is a question open to dispute, though it is to be hoped that the venerable ex-president rests more quietly in his grave. At all events, the performance is unpleasant and even gruesome for him who walks across the historic floor, while the white



THE DEMON CAT.

the horror of horrors, as it became common knowledge that one of the cats released into the Capitol Building to combat mice had carried within it... a demon! Oh, come now, would anyone believe such a thing? As the United States was preparing to take a starring role on the world stage, could the people in its very seat of power be gullible enough to believe that their Capitol was afflicted with a feline phantasm? Should that question occur to you, I am afraid you still have not learned your lesson. Yes, they believed! And continued to for decades. Newspapermen spread the word, and even if they themselves had never seen it and the evidence was dubious, they concocted sketches showing a giant, razor-toothed cat chasing labourers through the halls to provide all the confirmation that was needed for a credulous public.

With a disappointing lack of inspiration, the apparition was named “DC”, referring to both Demonic Cat and the District of Columbia, and it became a staple of Capitol lore and nearly as well known a presence as the senators themselves. And lest in your innocence you take this all as a joke, know that to the pundits it was a matter most serious. They whispered of certain tidings associated with the beast, as it seemed to appear immediately before natural disasters. They noted with alarm how sightings had occurred before a terrible flood hit Pennsylvania, and a hurricane came ashore in Texas, and an earthquake rocked San Francisco, and many other tragedies of the Devil’s doing. “Was the cat a harbinger?” they asked. “Or had its presence caused these disasters?” Or was it instead a tale based on old slanders that refused to die, and to which modern man should pay no heed? This question they did not ask, as too many people continued to accept as the most natural thing possible that a cat should be connected to evil. Beliefs die hard with your kind, and the centuries of oppression had by this time extended over millennia.



Excerpted from *A Cat's Tale: A Journey Through Feline History* by Paul Koudounaris. Published by Henry Holt and Company, 10 Nov 2020. Copyright © 2020 by Paul Koudounaris. All rights reserved.

◆ **BABA** is a domestic short-haired tabby with a love for adventure and history. Born to the rough streets of Los Angeles and educated in the school of hard knocks, she was interned in the city’s animal shelter at a young age only to be discovered there by her human co-author.

◆ **PAUL KOUDOUNARIS** has a PhD in Art History. He is the author of *The Empire of Death*, *Heavenly Bodies*, and *Memento Mori*, which all investigate the visual culture of death, a subject on which he has written on many occasions for FT. He began researching the history of cats several years ago, finding in this neglected field of study an affirmation of feline merit.



# THE FELINE MUSE: AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL KOUDOUNARIS



## FT: What was the genesis of the book?

PK: While I have published three previous books, they have all been about death. I had originally intended, as my next book, to write a history of pet cemeteries, which of course is very much related to the death material. But in the process of compiling that research I came across so many great cat stories, and I realised they had never gotten their due in the telling of history. I love cats, and it just so happened that mine, Baba, is an ace model. We had already been playing around doing cosplay shoots. So the pieces just kind of fell together: feline history, and let her tell it and let her play the roles.

## FT: What kind of sources did you draw on in attempting to write history from a feline viewpoint?

PK: There's an inherent problem with the source material, of course, which is that it is all written by humans rather than cats, as they don't leave written testimony. So it all had to be interpreted through the character of the narrator. In addition to the standard books on feline history, my biggest source, and overall the most important one for anything within the past 200 years, was newspaper archives. I spent months going through old newspapers on microfilm in a research library, picking out stories. The newspaper articles are wonderful because they tend to simply present the facts as the reporter understood them, rather than try to interpret them, the way academic history books do.

**FT: You and Baba have been making photographs together for some time, but people are bound to ask whether there is something unnatural about a cat dressing up in elaborate historical costumes...**

PK: It's not within the nature of cats to wear clothing generally, I agree. But I think to understand these photos one needs a sense of their context. At one time I had three cats (one has since died), and loved them all; but Baba, who was the middle girl, has always been absolutely dedicated to me. People will know what I mean: in some cases, with a particular animal, you have a bond that seems almost psychic or spiritual. When I would take photos of the other cats she would just jump in – basically photobombing – and dominate the photo. So she became my model and muse, and over time we started adding props, costumes, and so on. And the more complex they became, the more she responded – because she saw me grow more excited as the photos became more sophisticated. What you're really dealing with here is not a photo series, but a form of interspecies communication. I would envision roles, and she was determined to play them out. No, not consciously. Baba doesn't know Napoleon from a hole in the wall, but she knows me. And our bond is so deep and intense that she can read me, and she gets excited and happy seeing me get excited and happy. She knows me so well, in fact, that sometimes if we just couldn't get a



photo right I would want to take a break, turn off the lights and put her down from the box on which she poses – and she would jump back up on the box and stare me down, as if to say: "This is NOT good enough yet. Let's get it right." So there is far more going on in these photos than just a cat wearing a costume. It is an expression of the bond between us. So is it in a cat's nature to dress in costume? No of course not. But it *is* in the nature of our relationship.

## FT: How does your collaboration work?

PK: We have our collaborative process so well worked out by now that people are shocked at how quickly we can get these photos done. In some cases we only need a couple of tries; she reads me so well that she often knows exactly what to do. There is a photo of her as Andy Warhol, for instance, where we only took one shot. I spent half a day sewing her a little turtleneck, another half a day teasing a wig; it took two weeks to find the fabric for the background. And then the photo? When we finally got it together I said, "OK let's try a test." Looked at the test and, "Umm, yeah, that's it, exactly. OK, we're done." The shoot itself lasted less than a minute. She's just that good now. She knows how to lift her paws through the armholes of a costume, how to keep a wig or hat balanced, how to follow hand gestures and where to look. On my end, I figured out how to aid in getting different facial expressions by making different cues, often involving treats. An excited look? Hold out some salmon: she loves the stuff. A bored look? Beef. She's completely indifferent to it.

## FT: The book traces some highs and lows in the relationship between humankind and catkind. Where does Baba think we are today? Is our shared future one of greater understanding?

PK: From my perspective of spending a couple of years trying to empathise with her and channel what I felt was her innate character into words, I would say that neither she nor any other cat believes that we will ever return to the brutality of persecution and the way cats were treated during the era of the witch hunts. At the same time, I don't know that she would say we're really at a place of understanding. Perhaps we have even regressed over the past 20 years. I feel that any self-respecting cat would be aghast at the cat memes and cutesy videos that are popular online nowadays. That stuff is not what cats are; and as we try to demonstrate in the book, not what they have been about historically.



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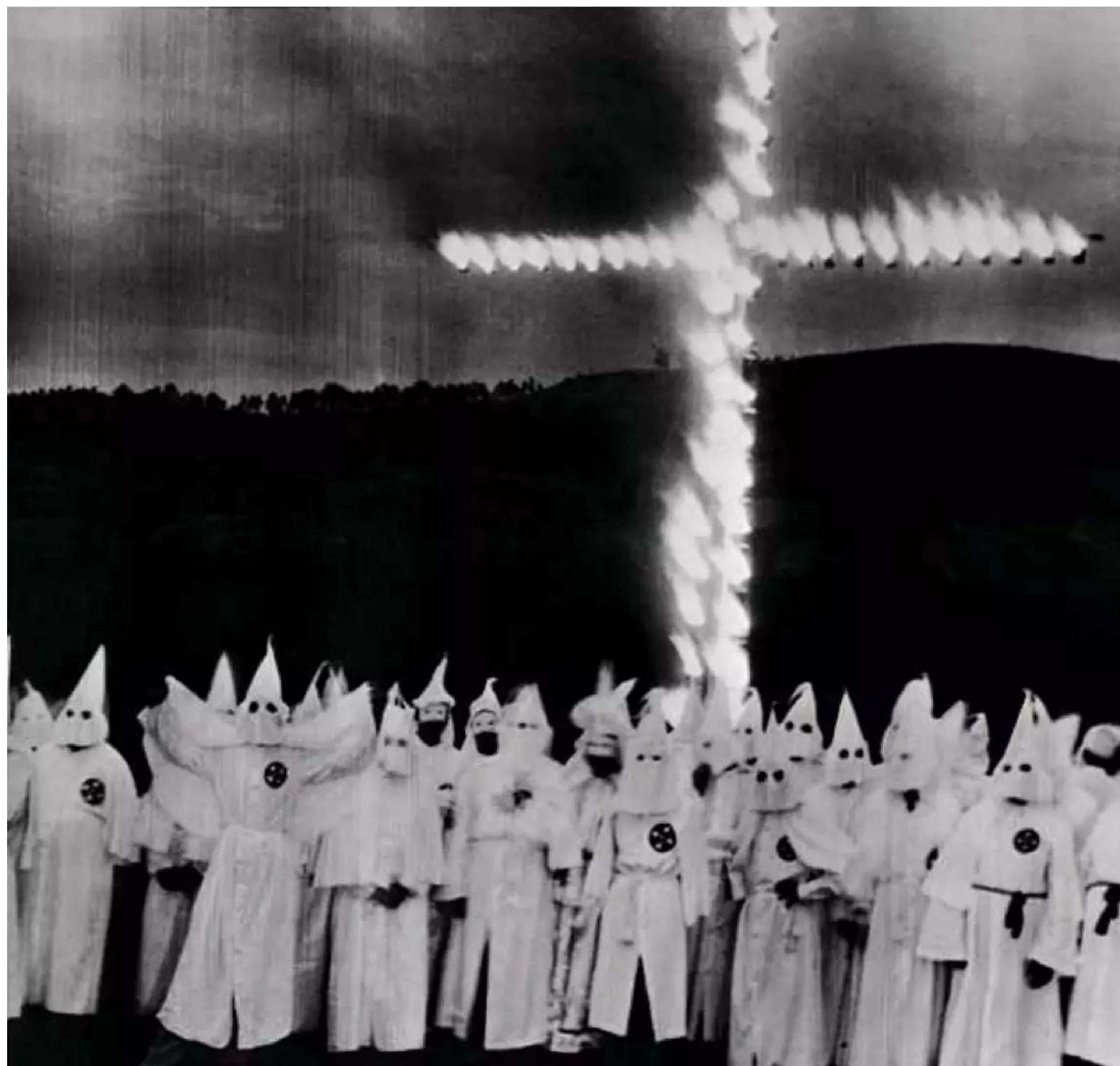
# THE AINTREE SPECTRES

There have been sightings of hooded, torch-brandishing figures in a field in Merseyside going back to World War II. But who or what are these Klan-like apparitions? Robed occultists? Scouse Klansmen? A secret Evangelical society? **ROB GANDY** investigates the strange case of the Aintree Spectres...

Following my *Strange Stories from Southport* article (FT370:42-45) I was contacted by Glen Preston (pseudonym) in September 2018 about some bizarre and frightening events that had taken place over a number of years just outside the village of Aintree, in the Merseyside borough of Sefton. The village is adjacent to – and gives its name to – the racecourse which annually hosts the famous Grand National. <sup>1</sup> If you travel north up Bull Bridge Lane and cross the River Alt at Bull Bridge on to Spencer's Lane, you will see a field immediately to the east (before Spencer's lane crosses the M57 motorway). This was the location of the following strange events, which were witnessed by members of Glen's family and others. <sup>2</sup>

## THE FIGURES IN THE FIELD

Having missed the last bus one early Autumn night in either 1967 or 1968, Glen's older brother Jeff (pseudonym), then in his late teens, was walking over Bull Bridge heading for the family home on Spencer's Lane. It was 11-11.30pm and the night was clear. This was in the days before the M57 motorway had been built (the local stretch only opened in 1972) and there was no street lighting to dispel the total darkness. It was at this point that Jeff noticed lights to his right, about 150 yards away in the field. What he saw was a group of roughly nine men carrying bright, burning torches and walking along the bank of the River Alt, heading away from him, southeast towards Fazakerley. They were wearing greyish robes with pointed hoods, similar in shape to those worn by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and marching two or three



LEFT: Witnesses describe hooded and robed figures carrying flaming torches, bringing to mind the Ku Klux Klan in the US – but this was in Aintree, not Alabama...

deceased) were driving home from Fazakerley around 9.30-10pm one October or November night in the early 1970s after their father had collected their mother from bingo. They crossed Bull Bridge and saw, in the same field to their right, a dozen or so men holding burning torches and wearing robes, some with pointed hoods. They were standing in a circle, as if involved in some sort of magical gathering. The parents did not stop for a closer look, but saw the group clearly through the car windows. It was fully dark at this time and

## *They were wearing greyish robes with pointed hoods and marching in line*

abreast in line, like soldiers. Understandably, Jeff was frightened and ran to his home to get his father out of bed. They went to the upstairs back bedroom window and could still see the torch-lit procession over the fields. Jeff was very scared, mainly because he did not know who or what the procession was, and decided to sleep on his parents' bedroom floor.

There was a sequel to this strange sighting. Glen recalls that their parents (now

Glen's father later said that it would have been impossible for the group not to have been seen by the many dozens of people who used the road. Despite this, his enquiries over the next few days as to whether or not anyone else had seen the group were met with blank looks. He had quite expected it to be the talk of the village and was perplexed by the fact that seemingly no one else had seen it. He later wondered if perhaps it had been some sort of Hallowe'en event, but seemed to think that the date would have been either too early or too late for this.

Sometime later, quite by chance and unprompted by Glen, the father of one of his friends (a security guard at the BICC works in Melling), told him of seeing the same, or a similar, strange gathering while travelling that stretch of road on his moped during the early hours of the morning.

Of course, perhaps all the witnesses had seen was a group of people with lighted





ABOVE: Looking from the Bull Bridge over the River Alt; the field is clearly visible to the left of the picture, the roofs of nearby houses to the right.

torches and robes messing about in a field. However, in the late 1980s, Glen's father was chatting to an old friend of his over a drink at the Horse & Jockey pub in Melling. His friend had long since emigrated to Canada, but was back in the country revisiting family and friends. The conversation turned to the subject of the supernatural, and so Glen's father started to relate his sighting of the group with torches and robes. Before he had got very far, his old friend interjected, saying that he knew exactly what he was going to say. He went on to relate that he had seen *exactly* the same sight when cycling back from a dance late one night, but he had observed the event from the Leeds-Liverpool Canal on the other side of the field. Significantly, the time when he had seen the torch-bearing group had occurred during the early stages of World War II when strict blackout procedures were in force – which was well over 40 years earlier.

## MAPPING THE MYSTERY

Naturally I was keen to establish whether there were other witnesses to these types of events, and my friends at the *Champion* newspaper<sup>3</sup> included a piece in the Aintree & Melling issue of 14 November 2018, which drew some responses. A number of people highlighted the fact that the field was the site of a fatal air crash on Grand National Day in 1964, in which the prominent journalist and broadcaster Nancy Spain, and Joan Werner Laurie, Editor of *'She'* magazine, were killed.<sup>4</sup>

There was one account, from a Mrs H, which was very similar to those mentioned

above. Her testimony was as follows:

*It was about 7pm one evening around Christmas 40 or so years ago, which would place it in the mid to late 1970s. I was in our car with my husband and young daughter travelling back to our home in Melling, having been to see my mother-in-law in the Fazakerley area. It was very dark and it was misty.*

*We crossed Bull Bridge on to Spencer's Lane when immediately to our left, and close to the road, we saw a group of people all dressed in light outfits that looked like those worn by the Ku Klux Klan! There were around half a dozen of them (although it might have been as few as four or as many as eight – it was difficult to judge in the circumstances and given that we passed them at a normal driving speed of around 30mph). Their appearance was very scary, and a bit spooky, and they looked as though they were getting ready to do something. My immediate reaction was 'What are they up to!?' None of them appeared to be carrying anything, and there were definitely no lights or torches. Naturally, we did not stop to investigate, as we were very, very frightened.*

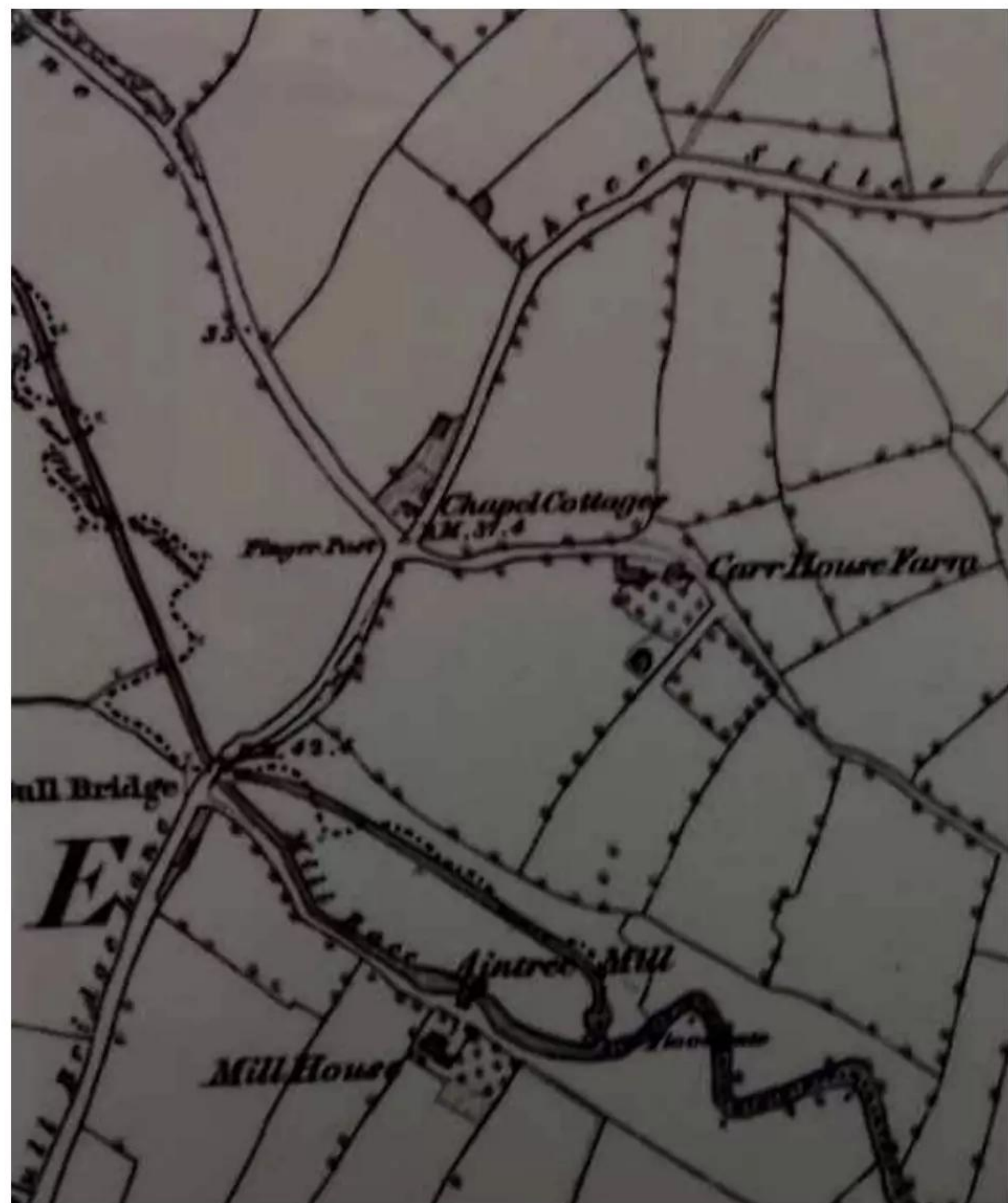
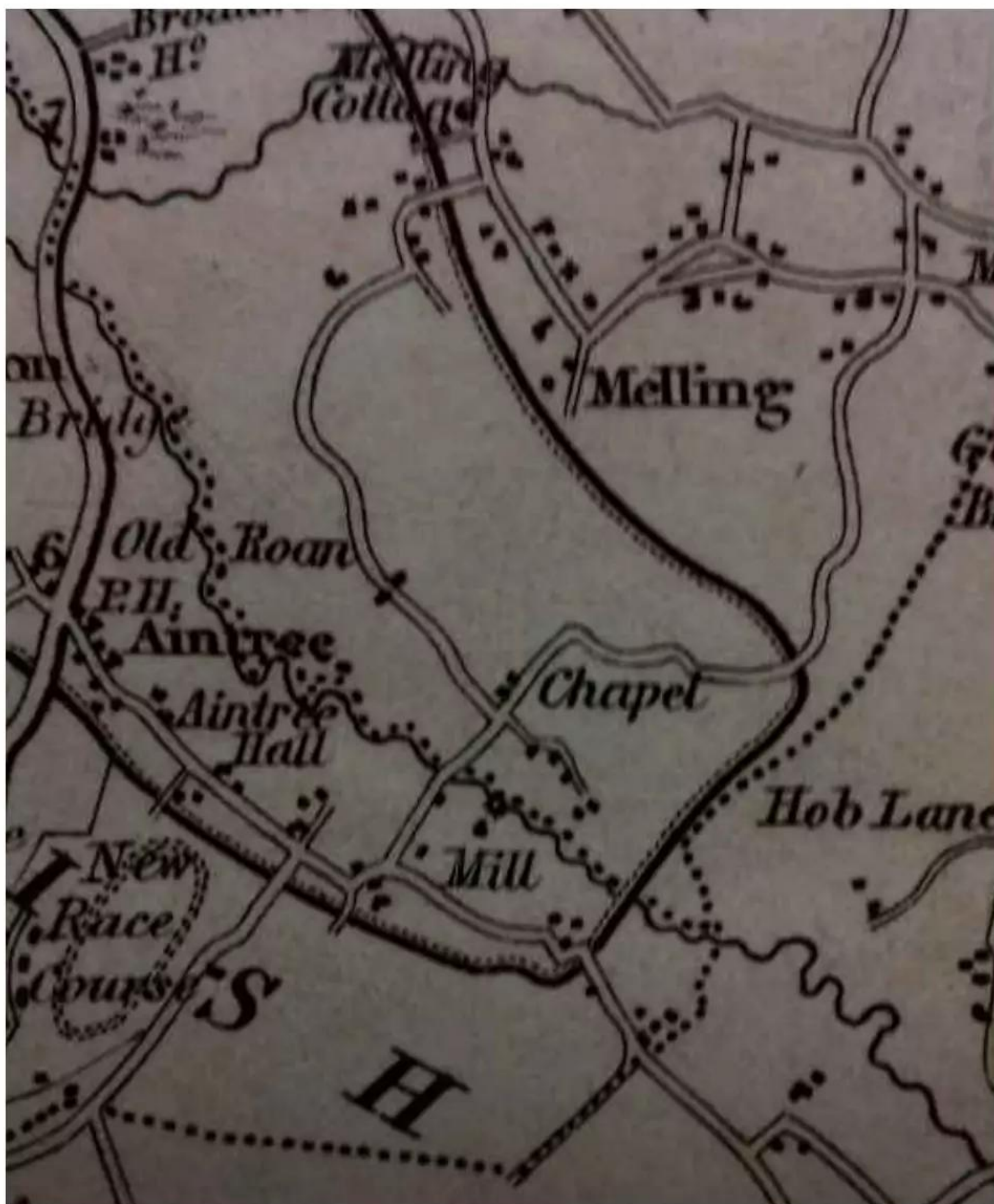
*I am a lifelong resident of Melling and was in my 30s at the time. I have seen nothing like what we saw that night, before or since. My husband (now deceased) and I never forgot this experience, and talked about it on many occasions, although we never heard of anyone else having the same or a similar encounter.*

These accounts describing what appears to be the same phenomenon taking place in the same location over a long period of time is definitely strange. Several of the

witnesses naturally inferred a paranormal source, but what is striking is how long Jeff Preston saw the spectres for on the night in question; for Jeff to run home the best part of 700m (2,300ft) and wake his father and for them to then see the procession would have taken many minutes. Paranormal events usually tend to be quite transient and short in duration. The fact that the spectres all behaved like people dressed up – rather than performing fantastical feats or fading from sight in a ghostly way – suggests a flesh-and-blood explanation. But given that the field is so large and open, and also close to a busy road and housing, any group of people undertaking the activities described would surely have expected to be readily observed and challenged, not least by the police and/or the farmer whose field it was. If it were some clandestine or magical group, then how did the participants get there, as in none of the events described was there reference to a series of cars parked at the side of the road by the field? If any group was undertaking some magical ritual, then there must be something particular and special about the field for them to (a) keep returning and (b) place themselves at such risk of observation.

I therefore decided to investigate whether there had been something significant about the field in the past, and went to the Liverpool Central Library to study the available maps relating to the area. Historically, the core of Aintree was a small linear settlement to the east of the centre of the current township on School Lane, heading north-eastwards up Bull Bridge Lane – i.e. towards and close to the field in





ABOVE: Two maps showing the area around the field. On the left is the Hennett map of 1830, on the right the Ordnance Survey map of 1847-1849.

question.<sup>5</sup> The length of the field along the River Alt is approximately 700m (2,300ft), with its width ranging from 200m (660ft) at its narrowest (i.e. to Brewery Lane) to 360m (1,180ft) at its widest.

The maps went back as far as 1786, and in all of them the field is simply farmland. The Hennett map (1830) shows a mill on the River Alt and marks a chapel on the far left of the crossroads, approximately 200m (660ft) from Bull Bridge. By comparing different maps, it can be deduced that the chapel must have been built between 1818 and 1830, which means that it is not 'historic'. In 1847/49, Carr House Farm is in the middle of the field, and 'Chapel Cottages' are seen where the chapel was recorded previously. A Facebook community enquiry by Glen Preston established that it was a Methodist chapel, and that where it was situated was always known locally as 'Methodist Brow'. He was told that some of the original foundation stones are clearly visible from Spencer's Lane. Looking at current maps, it appears that the works building near to the motorway is on the site of Carr House Farm, and the road to it follows the original farm road.

I also spoke to a local farmer who told me that although he does not farm the field in question, he knows it is good farming land. He understands that the field was part of Lord Sefton's estate, which was sold off in (he thought) the 1950s or 1960s. It was originally intended for building houses, but as it is on a flood plain it is unlikely that building will ever take place. In the circumstances, the land has come under

## They congregate at specific times of year at four locations

several tenant farmers.

It can be concluded that there has never been anything 'special' historically about the field, such as its having been the site of a mediæval monastery or something else that might in itself attract a magical or religious group. I took the opportunity to ask the farmer if he or anyone he knows had witnessed any 'spectres'. He responded by saying that his family had been in the area since 1933, and he has been around for over 60 years, and so he knows a lot of people. He has never seen anything, or known anyone who has seen anything (although he has heard rumours at times). Via an intermediary, I also contacted the current owners of Mill Farm, which overlooks the field from across the River Alt. The inhabitants have lived there for 30 years and have never seen or heard anything, which suggests that nothing similar has occurred since the late 1980s.

### COULD IT BE MAGIC?

In light of the hooded, Klan-like apparel reported by witnesses and the suspicion

that some sort of magical group might be involved, I asked my Weird Weekend North colleague Steve Jones, a practising Pagan, if he was aware of any such group in the area. He wasn't, but agreed to post the question on his Facebook account and that of other pagan groups. This resulted in the following testimony from Mark, one of his pagan friends:

*While at university in Liverpool during the mid 1980s I was interested in spiritual things and was 'looking' for a form of Christianity I could feel comfortable with. I dabbled with a number of opportunities, including being 'Born Again' around 1985/86. However, I had reservations because it did not feel right, and I was not persuaded by a Billy Graham revival meeting at Anfield in Liverpool in 1984. Nevertheless, I allowed a girl I fancied to talk me into going to a 'meeting' of evangelicals in a sports hall out in, as I recall, Kirkby.*

*The evangelical group appeared to have been well-established for some time, reflected in the fact that it had hired the sports hall for the evening. There were lots of people there; mostly people in their 20s and 30s, although some were older. I went twice, but each occasion caused me deep disquiet; it was 'full on' stuff! I remember people speaking in tongues, and reciting long Bible passages from memory in trance-like stares – everything in fact except the wrestling of snakes! As a 'newbie' and outsider I found that I could see no main focus.*

*Nevertheless, it was clear that there was a secretive inner circle, whose members definitely led things. What stood out for me was the treatment of a former member, who had*





KEYSTONE PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Police examine the wreckage of the Piper Apache that crashed in the field in 1964 killing five people, including Nancy Spain and Joan Werner Laurie.

*apparently gone to the 'dark side'. I remember people being instructed not to interact with him in any way and to go to the other side of the street to ignore him, as he was 'controlled by the Devil'.*

*I found it scary when talking to people that some identified themselves as social workers, lawyers, teachers, and similar; with almost all saying that they were not from the area but had been 'called there' by God. These people absolutely believed in the physicality of evil and the Devil. I never went back after the second visit.*

I asked Mark if he thought that dressing up in KKK-type clothes and parading around a field at night with burning torches might be the sort of thing that such a 'secretive inner circle' might get up to, away from the main group. His response was that, given the level of weirdness he had witnessed, he thought that this could well be the case. It should be noted that the main Sports Centre in Kirkby is no more than three miles from the field in question – less than a 10-minute drive.

Following on from Mark's story, I contacted Merseyside Anti-Fascist Network to see if they were aware of any extreme right wing/KKK-type groups that could be linked to such Christian Fundamentalists. This drew a blank, although inevitably there were one or two speculations.

## THE LILY WHITE BOYS

By February 2019, I felt that I had exhausted all reasonable avenues of enquiry about this mystery, and so it was

at that point that I wrote up the above and submitted it FT. Then, by chance, I read the Wirral Globe free weekly newspaper's *Haunted Wirral* article of 15 May 2019, which was written by Tom Slemen, the well-known local writer of Merseyside ghost stories. What caught my eye was a reference to attackers vandalising graves in Ford Cemetery in Bootle (just over three miles from Bull Bridge Lane) in 1974, where witnesses described "weird hooded figures in robes reminiscent of those worn by the KKK, only the hoods had bizarre exaggerated noses made from cones of fabric stitched onto them." Tom argued that these were members of an "ancient sect of druid-like warriors [known as] the Lily White Boys." He referred to further graveyard desecrations in Bootle and Birkenhead as late as 1982, where the latter incident had the Lily White Boys waving swords and chasing a couple at 1am to the girl's home on Sumner Road, which was at least a quarter of a mile away.<sup>6</sup>

More details about the Lily White Boys were provided on Tom's website, where he suggests that this Sun-worshipping cult is rumoured to predate Christianity and practises animal sacrifice and allegedly once went in for child sacrifice. There is an early reference to them in the ancient folk song called "Green Grow the Rushes O", with the line "Two, two, lily-white boys, clothed all in green".<sup>7</sup> He states that they have been seen for hundreds of years across the country, but locally they congregate at specific times of year at four locations: Wirral's Bidston Hill, a field

between Waddicar and Melling, Bowring Park (on the Liverpool-Huyton border), and the Delamere Forest. Of course, the field between Waddicar and Melling is the one that I had been investigating! Tom describes one incident as follows:

*One Harvest Moon night in the 1970s, Brian and Tina, a young couple travelling homewards down Bull Bridge Lane in Aintree, saw a circle of figures in green robes standing in a field around a bonfire, and one of the figures was holding what looked like a small doll-like effigy. Brian got out of his car near the River Alt to get a better look at the strange ceremony, and asked an old passer-by what was going on. 'It's the Lily White Boys burning a child,' said the oldster, gravely, and he advised Brian not to go anywhere near the group, or they would kill him too. 'You're joking,' said Brian, 'that's some Guy Fawkes thing they're burning – isn't it?' But the old man shook his head solemnly. Brian raced home and called the police, but only the charred remains of a sheep was found in the smouldering vestiges on the following day.*

Tom also refers to incidents in WWII; one had ARP wardens investigating a huge bonfire at Bowring Park (during a blackout) and being faced with "green-robed men and naked women dancing around the fire, (with) five of these men, wielding scythes and swords". Such references tie in timewise with the aforementioned experience of Glen and Jeff's father's friend who had emigrated to Canada. I shared Tom's stories with Jeff and Mrs H,



and asked if the descriptions fitted with the KKK figures that they had seen. Jeff said that he didn't recall the 'exaggerated noses' mentioned, but then the figures that he saw were at a distance and heading away from him; and if the colour being referred to is a light green, then it would be quite difficult to distinguish this in torchlight from the 'greyish' colour that he recalls. Similarly, for Mrs H a light green outfit could well have appeared to be white/ light-coloured when (part) illuminated by car headlights; and, travelling at 30mph, she could not recall any 'exaggerated noses'.

## CULTS AND CHRISTIANS

I tried to contact Tom Slemen via the *Wirral Globe* with a view to comparing notes and sources, and specifically whether he knew if the robes were dark or light green. Unfortunately, Tom did not get back to me, and so I have not been able to take things further in this regard. Intriguingly, his stories about the Lily White Boys tie in well with the first- and second-hand testimonies I have collected in terms of both appearance and (some of the) actions of the mysterious figures in the field. His earliest references to incidents were in WWII and his last was the early 1980s – again consistent with the testimonies I collected.

It can be concluded that these 'spectres' have been seen on several occasions over a period from the mid to late 1960s to the mid to late 1970s, and possibly as far back as WWII and as recently as the early 1980s. There was great consistency in where and what was witnessed, suggesting a single if infrequent phenomenon. It is understandable that (my) witnesses believed that there might be something paranormal or supernatural involved, mostly because they were so scared by what they were seeing. But the very nature of the events points to human involvement. Of course, the outfits worn were not necessarily KKK-related; pointed hats of a conical form, *capirote*s, are part of the uniforms of some Catholic brotherhoods during Easter observances and re-enactments in some areas during Holy Week in Spain.<sup>8</sup> With that in mind, religious robes specific to a cult, such as the *Lily White Boys*, would make a lot of sense. Nevertheless, it would be imprudent to exclude the possibility that the motivation behind the activities was political and/or malevolent in some way.

The maps studied do not indicate any explicit ancient presence on the site that would be likely to attract a magical group on a recurring basis. The field might not have any special feature or power; although according to 'Captain Moonlight' "Aintree derives its name from the Anglo-Saxon 'an-treow' – meaning 'one tree' and that one tree was an ancient sprawling oak, sacred to the Druids and the Lily-White Boys cult of nature worshippers."<sup>9</sup> Alternatively, it might simply



be that the field is large, reasonably out-of-the-way and convenient for the participants. The timing of Mark's experiences with Christian Fundamentalists is not inconsistent with the sightings, because this would only stretch dates into the mid 1980s, but it would seem that the phenomenon has ceased since the late 1980s.

But if what was witnessed *did* involve a cult called the Lily White Boys, then is it still active or has it disbanded (on Merseyside at least)? Perhaps it has simply withered on the vine as its members have grown old and died, and their children or other potential members have turned their backs on it. I have 'google-researched' as much as I can about the Lily White Boys and other than references to *Green Grow the Rushes O*, Harry Cookson's 1960 play of this name and a story of this title by William Maxwell, I have not been able to find anything wholly independent of Tom Slemen's writings. My enquiries with FT's Dr David Clarke about whether he was aware of the cult through his folklore network and Steve Jones through his pagan contacts also drew a blank. Perhaps the Lily White Boys are nothing more than a literary device created by Tom Slemen to provide a colourful backstory to actual local events or stories that he has picked up on. After all, I am unlikely to be the only person that witnesses have spoken to about this phenomenon. Unfortunately, I won't know for sure unless Mr Slemen gets in touch.

Irrespective of names and history, there seems to be the distinct possibility that some form of sect was involved; maybe, in the early 1980s, its members changed tack and followed an entryist route into the local Christian Fundamentalist group (for whatever reason) and *were* the "secretive inner circle" that Mark remembered. Such a potential link is pure speculation on my part, of course. However, I think that I can safely say that it is highly unlikely that a Spanish

**LEFT:** *Capirote*-wearing penitents from the Santísimo Cristo de las Injurias brotherhood take part in a Holy Week procession in Zamora, Spain.

brotherhood would travel to Merseyside to practise their observances and re-enactments in the middle of a farmer's field in the middle of the night in the middle of winter.

## CONCLUSIONS

Before seeing Tom Slemen's article, my best guess was that the Aintree Spectres were a small group of (local) Christian Fundamentalists who enjoyed the excitement of dressing up in KKK-type apparel and performing rituals with burning torches in the middle of the night, perhaps with some political backdrop. Pointing the finger at the Lily White Boys (or whatever they might be called) has obvious attractions; but, as highlighted above, I could find no evidential sources independent of Tom's Slemen's writings. Then, of course, there is the problem that secret sects are by definition *secret*. Therefore, assuming that the Lily White Boys actually existed, it would be virtually impossible to confirm whether or not they were involved, short of a (former) member coming forward. So unless someone who participated in such events, or knows someone who did, is prepared to make an admission – which might simply be something along the lines of "It was me and me mates having a laugh!" – I will have to adopt a forteen stance and keep an open mind on exactly what lies behind this very peculiar phenomenon.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Steve Jones, David Clarke and *The Champion* newspaper for their help and advice in this research.

## REFERENCES

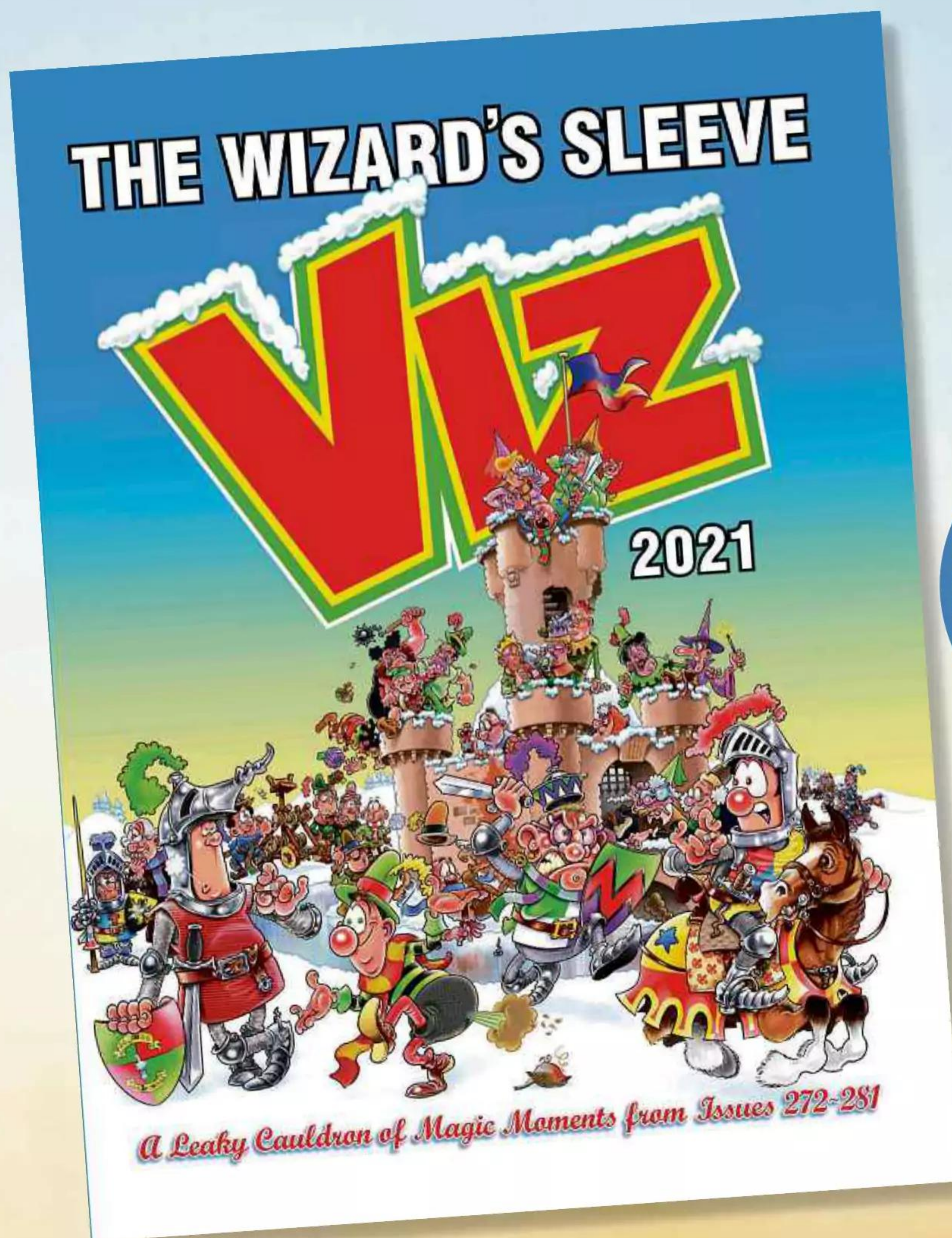
- 1 [www.thejockeyclub.co.uk/aintree/events-tickets/grand-national/about-the-event/grand-national-event-history/](http://www.thejockeyclub.co.uk/aintree/events-tickets/grand-national/about-the-event/grand-national-event-history/)
- 2 By coincidence, close to the bottom of Bull Bridge Lane is the Blue Anchor pub where my work colleague told me his first-hand 'real-life experience' of a phantom hitchhiker, which led to my *Old Man of Halsall Moss* research [FT56:52-53; FT328:32-39].
- 3 [www.champnews.com/](http://www.champnews.com/)
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➡ **ROB GANDY** is a visiting professor at the Liverpool Business School, John Moores University, and a regular contributor to FT. He will next be turning his attention to strangeness in Lincolnshire.



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\*\*Source: ABC figure experienced during a dream after eating a large amount of cheese



# DISTANT EARLY WARNINGS

As Covid-19 transforms our everyday environment into a new source of fear, **STEVE TOASE** opens his ears to the hallucinatory sounds of Emergency Population Warning Systems, uncovering a fortean history of Cold War paranoia, escaped murderers and ghostly sirens.

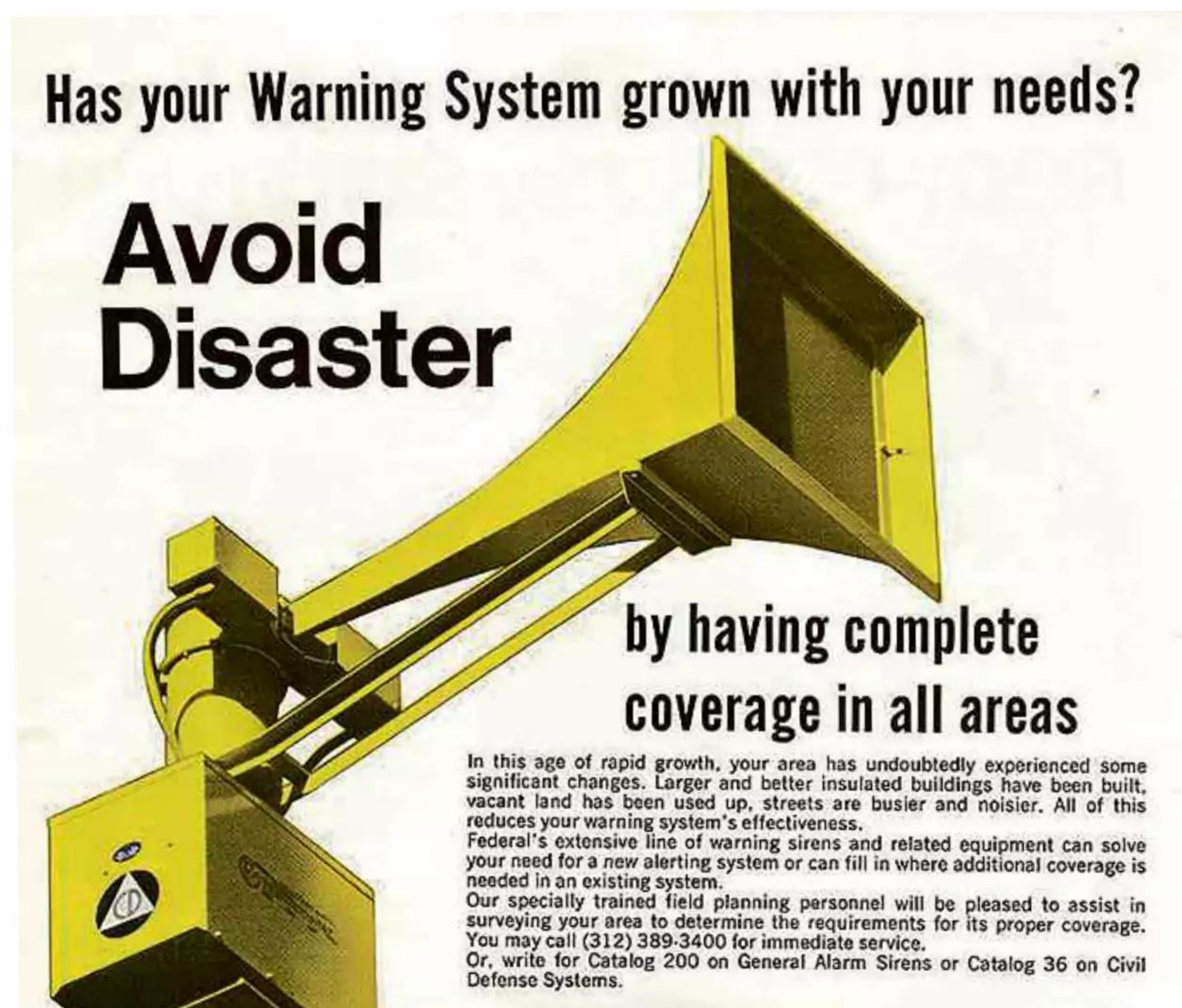
**S**ometimes you experience an event so unsettling that it brings you up short, and you have to take a few moments to process your reaction. The Covid-19 pandemic has been full of them, and many more unpleasant than the one I'm going to discuss here.

On a sunny weekend afternoon in Munich, the sound of a PA broadcast came into earshot. First in German, then in English, the announcement outlined, briefly, the restrictions now in place across Bavaria due to the pandemic.

"Dear fellow citizens. Everyone in Bavaria is currently restricted from public areas and confined to their own premises. Stay at home. It is still possible to go to work, visit the doctor and purchase groceries. Restrictions are strictly monitored and violators will be prosecuted."

Beyond the immediate unsettling context of the announcement, hearing the cold, almost mechanical, recitation brought on a Proustian rush that took me straight back to my childhood and life during the Cold War.

Emergency Population Warning Systems (EPWS), as they're technically known, have a long history – and that history is woven through with a hint of forteana. By their nature, EPWS are intrusive and otherworldly.



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**LEFT:** A 1974 advertisement for Federal Thunderbolt sirens. **FACING PAGE:** One of a number of surviving Civil Defence sirens in Los Angeles.

system, a network stretching over 435 miles (700km) with beacons at 60-mile (100km) intervals. Recent experiments suggest that a message could be transmitted the length of the system in just an hour.

The air raid sirens of WWII are probably the most familiar type of EPWS to FT readers. Even though most of us are lucky enough to have

not experienced them during conflict, their mechanical wail is a familiar sound and still incredibly unsettling. (Strangely, both the German 'Meiers Trumpets', as Berliners called their wartime sirens, and the British sirens manufactured by Carters and Gents have the same rising cadence as the siren goes off). Siren-type warning systems still exist across the globe, whether to warn of tsunamis in Hawaii or San Francisco, earthquakes in Japan, or non-specific civil emergencies in Germany.

More recently, on 10 September, Germany held its first 'Warntag' ('Warning Day'). Rather than being a celebration of the weird and wonderful world of Emergency

**"Restrictions are strictly monitored and violators will be prosecuted"**

Throughout their history, EPWS have taken many forms, both audible and visible. Arguably, one of the earliest examples was the ninth-century Byzantine beacon







Population Warning Systems, this was an event to test the mechanisms in case of a future emergency. At 11am, test announcements were sent out via TV, radio, sirens, and the Katwarn app, which is used to alert people of local emergencies. It is currently unclear if this will become an annual day in the German calendar.

## HIGH SECURITY SIRENS

Two of the more unusual non-verbal EPWS exist in the United Kingdom. Broadmoor High Security Psychiatric Hospital was first built as the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum, accepting its first patients in the early 1860s. During his 1952 escape, serial killer John Straffen murdered a local child, leading to the creation of the Broadmoor alarm system. The network of sirens was based on WWII air raid siren technology, and built in 13 locations around the hospital to warn local communities in case of an escape.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, the sirens were tested every Monday morning, and were last used to warn of an escape in 1991. By the end of 2019, the official decommissioning of the Broadmoor system was at last complete; the sirens were removed, their future uncertain, although West London NHS Trust was apparently in talks with museums in the hope of finding a home for some of them.

In a 2012 article for *1843 Magazine*, novelist Patrick McGrath reminisced about growing up at Broadmoor when his father was the medical superintendent there and recalled the spindly, Eiffel Tower like sirens and their “sing-song drone”: “Unless it was 10 o’clock on a Monday morning, when the siren was tested, this meant an escape.” These were rare, but his father lived in constant dread of the sound, which would announce one of the patients fleeing. McGrath recalled the time that the siren did indeed signal the escape of one of the patients. It was believed at the time that ‘Denis’ had wandered off from the work party, then panicked on hearing the siren. The escapee’s mother left out bread and milk for him each night. After hiding in the hayloft at the chaplain’s house for a few days, Denis gave himself up. Years later, in 2009, McGrath found out that far from being a panicked patient, ‘Denis’ had raped a child while on the run.<sup>2</sup>

The State Hospital at Carstairs in Scotland also houses high security patients and is surrounded by a network of nine sirens, broadcasting warnings over the nearby landscape. Probably the most chilling escape at Carstairs was the breakout of murderers Thomas McCulloch and Robert Mone, which led to the killing of a nurse, a patient, and a police officer.<sup>3</sup>

The chilling aspect of hearing these sirens outside a practice test is the fear they create, one that goes back to campfire stories of escaped killers beating severed heads on car roofs. Communities around both Broadmoor and Carstairs have specific drills to undertake in order to protect themselves, particularly schools in the vicinity.

## SONIC ATTACKS

Nuclear warnings are far more widespread, and far more embedded in our national psyche. The four-minute warning, the announcement that would tell us of our upcoming destruction, is a major part of the cultural debitage from the Cold War (see also FT379:30-36, 38-43).

Following an actual attack, an announcement would be broadcast to the population, with the government having the power to interrupt all TV and radio broadcasts via the Wartime Broadcast

Service.<sup>4</sup> The script, codenamed Falsetto, was recorded by Radio 4’s continuity announcer Peter Donaldson (see panel). This found its way into the national consciousness, heavily influencing the Hawkwind track “Sonic Attack”, a too-real-for-comfort-sounding broadcast that begins:

*In case of Sonic Attack on your district  
Follow these rules  
If you are making love, it is imperative to bring  
all bodies to orgasm simultaneously  
Do not waste time blocking your ears*



RICHARD MILDENHALL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



BRENDAN AND RUTH MCCARTNEY

TOP: Broadmoor Hospital; until recently it was surrounded by a network of 13 warning sirens. ABOVE LEFT: John Straffen, whose escape from Broadmoor and murder of a local child led to the creation of the Broadmoor alarm system. ABOVE RIGHT: One of the Broadmoor sirens; this one was at Crowthorne.





*Do not waste time seeking a soundproof shelter  
Try to get as far away from the sonic source as possible  
Do not panic  
(Do not panic).*

“Sonic Attack” has been performed by several vocalists, including Brian Blessed, who might not have been as reassuring as Peter Donaldson, but was almost certainly more motivating.

In 2018 composer Lawrence English used the remaining sirens of the decommissioned Los Angeles Civil Defense System to broadcast “Seirá”, a vocal piece recorded with the Brisbane choir Australian Voices and inspired by the 500 series air raid siren’s distinctive wail. During one performance, members of the Selah Gospel Choir were among the crowd and at a predetermined moment began to echo the voices coming from the siren.<sup>5</sup>

This was not the first time LA’s sirens have featured in a performance. In 2017, director Yuval Sharon using their distinctive tones in a staging of Annie Gosfield’s opera *The War of the Worlds*, based on Orson Welles’s 1938 radio drama.

Comedy sketch shows might not be the first place you’d look to find disturbing parodies of EPWS, but ‘The Quiz Broadcast’, a recurring sketch on the series *That Mitchell and Webb Look*, has long provided an unsettling parody of post ‘Event’ entertainment. Most of the sketches featured contestants who were survivors of The Event answering questions on pre-Event people, or ‘The Headline Round’, frequently interrupted by the screen flashing to a “Remain Indoors” message. The ‘After the Event’ animation produced by BBC Comedy to herald the series even parodied the Peter Donaldson broadcast. Recorded in 2010, it saw a notable rise in views following the beginning of the pandemic in 2020.

## SPECTRAL SIRENS

Because of their range, and ability to appear not to have a specific source, warning sirens can be difficult to pinpoint. Many places using emergency sirens, such as the Isle of Man, Belgium, and San Francisco, carry out regular siren tests. Often these happen at a specific time of day, once a week or once a

# CODENAME FALSETTO

## ANNOUNCING THE END OF THE WORLD



ABOVE: Following a nuclear attack, the following text would have been broadcast to the nation, read by Radio 4 newsreader and continuity announcer Peter Donaldson.

“This is the Wartime Broadcasting Service. This country has been attacked with nuclear weapons. Communications have been severely disrupted, and the number of casualties and the extent of the damage are not yet known. We shall bring you further information as soon as possible. Meanwhile, stay tuned to this wavelength, stay calm and stay in your own homes.

“Remember there is nothing to be gained by trying to get away. By leaving your homes you could be exposing yourselves to greater danger. If you leave, you may find yourself without food, without water, without accommodation and without protection. Radioactive fall-out, which follows a nuclear explosion, is many times more dangerous if you are directly exposed to it in the open. Roofs and walls offer substantial protection. The safest place is indoors.

“Make sure gas and other fuel supplies are turned off and that all fires are extinguished. If mains water is available, this can be used for fire-fighting. You should also refill all your containers for drinking water after the fires have been put out, because the mains water supply may not be available for very long.

“Water must not be used for flushing lavatories: until you are told that lavatories may be used again, other toilet arrangements must be made. Use your water only for essential drinking and cooking purposes. Water means life. Don’t waste it.

“Make your food stocks last: ration your supply, because it may have to last for fourteen days or more. If you have fresh food in the house, use this first to avoid wasting it: food in tins will keep.

“If you live in an area where a fall-out warning has been given, stay in your fall-out room until you are told it is safe to come out. When the immediate danger has passed the sirens will sound a steady note. The “all clear” message will also be given on this wavelength. If you leave the fall-out room to go to the lavatory or replenish food or water supplies, do not remain outside the room for a minute longer than is necessary.

“Do not, in any circumstances, go outside the house. Radioactive fall-out can kill. You cannot see it or feel it, but it is there. If you go outside, you will bring danger to your family and you may die. Stay in your fall-out room until you are told it is safe to come out or you hear the “all clear” on the sirens.

“Here are the main points again:

“Stay in your own homes, and if you live in an area where a fall-out warning has been given stay in your fall-out room, until you are told it is safe to come out. The message that the immediate danger has passed will be given by the sirens and repeated on this wavelength. Make sure that the gas and all fuel supplies are turned off and that all fires are extinguished.

“Water must be rationed, and used only for essential drinking and cooking purposes. It must not be used for flushing lavatories. Ration your food supply: it may have to last for 14 days or more.

“We shall repeat this broadcast in two hours’ time. Stay tuned to this wavelength, but switch your radios off now to save your batteries until we come on the air again. That is the end of this broadcast.”





**LEFT:** Listeners gather beneath a Los Angeles Civil Defence siren to hear Lawrence English's musical piece *Seiré*. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Composer Annie Gosfield's opera *War of the Worlds* also made use of the LA Sirens. **BELOW:** A German warning siren; the recent *warntag* also relied on more modern technologies.

month, the routine allowing populations to separate a test from an emergency. However, there have been several examples of ghost sirens over the years.

Back in 2015, Swansea was plagued by a mysterious wailing sound, described by witnesses as “like a siren you hear in war films” (FT334:4; 340:8). Swansea Council had been receiving complaints about the phantom noise for over a year, but the volume increased during 2015. The council’s Noise Abatement Team investigated, but failed to identify the source. Soon afterwards, the siren abruptly stopped its early morning wailing, with officials and witnesses no wiser as to the source. <sup>6</sup>

Another forteen (and probably Scarfolkian; yes, it is a word) disturbance was reported in September 2018 by Ipswich resident Alice Randle, who had been having her sleep disturbed by a haunting rendition of “It’s Raining, It’s Pouring” (see FT373:22). Sometimes the child’s voice recited the nursery rhyme once or twice in the early hours. On other occasions, the ditty was repeated over and over again.

After Ms Randle and several other residents reported the disturbance to Ipswich council, their rapid response team tracked the origin to a warehouse on the nearby Farthing Road industrial estate. The owners of the site told Ms Randle that their unsettling alarm system was triggered by spiders crawling across motion sensors, causing the very loud burglar deterrent to broadcast the stuff of nightmares to their sleeping neighbours. <sup>7</sup>

These ghostly sirens are found all over the globe. In Oklahoma County, just before Hallowe’en 2018, residents were unnerved by an unearthly wailing sound that could be heard across local communities. The



**The siren sounds to let people know that for 12 hours all crime is legal**

source of the sound turned out to be a malfunctioning siren at nearby Tinker Air Force Base. <sup>8</sup>

## PANDEMIC ALERTS

More recently, during the Covid-19 pandemic, East London residents were disturbed by the sound of a siren. Some have suggested that it might have been the Thames Flood Barrier testing its siren, a continuous tone to alert boats that the flood gates are about to rise. It’s possible that the lessening of traffic, air travel and social life during the lockdown has led to a quieter environment, with sound being carried further and creating out-of-place alerts heard over a much greater distance than was ever intended. <sup>9</sup>

However, some local authorities have made missteps with their EPWS during the crisis. Yeovil residents compared the siren used by Leonardo Helicopters during the ‘clap for carers’ initiative to the siren from *The Purge* horror film franchise – which sounds to let people know that for 12 hours all crime, including murder, is legal. <sup>10</sup>

This was bad enough, you’d think, but some authorities around the globe went one step further. In the Philippines, for example, the city government in Sampaloc, Manila, used the distinctive *Purge* siren to signal the beginning of hard lockdown, as did that of Cebu City, while a town in Tarlac province used a similar alarm to mark the start of curfew. <sup>11</sup>

Local authorities in the Philippines weren’t the only ones to use the film’s siren to warn communities about the start of curfews. In the United States, Crowley Police Department in Louisiana marked the beginning of curfew by broadcasting the *Purge* siren to the local community, a move





ABOVE LEFT: *That Mitchell and Webb Look* featured a recurring 'Quiz Broadcast' segment parodying 'post-Event' entertainment. ABOVE RIGHT: A poster for Germany's 'Warning Day' 2020, during which preparedness for a future emergency was tested. BELOW: A poster for one of the *Purge* movies.

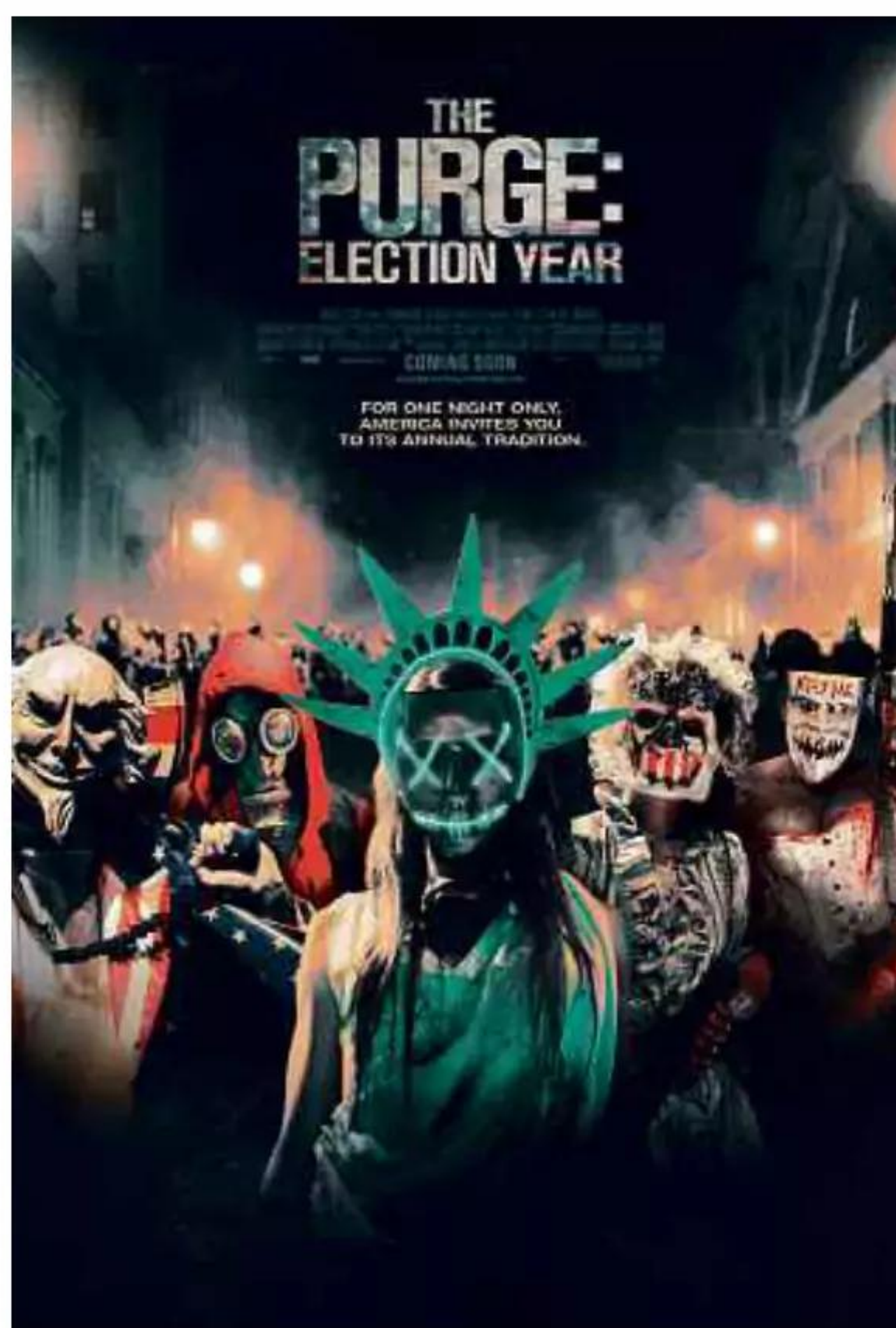
that met with over 500 complaints.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, an ambulance operated by American Medical Response drove through the deserted streets of Washington DC, playing the distinctive sound. (This doesn't seem to have been officially sanctioned, with two employees responsible resigning soon after.)<sup>13</sup>

While it would be tempting to suggest that this was just an oversight by the authorities in question, the siren from *The Purge* is very distinctive, with a specific interval, and certainly had the effect of making residents aware of the curfew conditions.

### FUTURE SOUNDSCAPES

In their review of Lawrence English's *Seirá*, the *LA Times* wrote that the opening of the piece almost had the quality of "an auditory hallucination", and I think this is one of the reasons EPWS are so unnerving: they intrude on us, but as if they are coming



from somewhere else. We can't immediately pinpoint their source, so they share certain characteristics with the hallucination or the spectral experience, compounded by the anxiety of the situations in which they are used.

As communities such as Hebden Bridge employ EPWS to warn of flooding, it seems possible that these sounds will once more become part of the soundscape for parts of the population. Whether that will normalise the broadcasts or see an increase in reports of spectral sirens remains to be seen...

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## CRAZY LITTLE THING CALLED LOVE

With the US gripped by election fever, **SD TUCKER** evaluates the decades-long quest of perennial presidential candidate and committed numerologist Love 22 to undermine the US economy by releasing a flood of very funny money indeed into circulation

**A**round about the time you're reading these words, the world should know whether Donald Trump or Joe Biden has been voted in as the next President of the United States; but, with a Covid-ravaged economy presenting severe financial challenges for whoever's in the White House, the role may prove more burden than triumph. As economies reel from the impact of lockdowns and Treasuries run out of free cash to dole out to the unemployed and forcibly furloughed, it's unclear whether Biden, with his 'Green New Deal', or Trump, with his promises of a post-vaccine Wall Street bounceback, really have the answers to the challenge at hand. If things get any worse, the next leader of the Free World might find himself having to try out some very unorthodox economic remedies indeed. Given this, whichever of the two contenders ends up winning, America may regret not having chosen a different, rather more obscure, candidate for POTUS instead...

### THE MAGIC NUMBER

What's your lucky number? Studies show that the usual answer to that question, from Sevenoaks to Shanghai, is 'seven', but not for one man. The obscure but undeniably persistent perennial US presidential candidate 'Love 22' (he officially changed his name from plain old Lawrence Wagner in 1970) claims to have discovered compelling evidence that the entire Universe is based upon the number 22 after undergoing some kind of numerological enlightenment one day while pondering the supposedly fraudulent nature of the US money system.

Upon "PUTTING 2 AND 2 TOGETHER" and realising that the entire sum total of US dollars in circulation was not backed up by palpable Treasury possession of reserves of gold and silver to an equivalent value, but based instead largely upon the arbitrary issuing of Federal bonds, Love 22 quit his \$10,000 job as a high-school teacher in Rhode Island and began wandering up and down the country (as well as visiting 21 other lands – that's 22 in total) dressed as Uncle Sam, handing out fake \$22 bills with his own face on them, in order to make a vital point about the debased nature of modern floating fiat currencies. Running for President every



## THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE IS BASED UPON THE NUMBER 22

four (that's 2+2) years, his "22+ year" career in front-line national politics has been even longer than that of the famously dodderly Uncle Joe Biden, who first took up a seat as a US Senator in 1973. Champion frisbee player Love 22 made most of his (real) money as a street-entertainer, or at weddings, birthdays and bar mitzvahs, where he would fold his phoney bills into bow-ties and strange origami-shapes while shouting out a litany of curious 22-related facts about maths; it seems, though, that the boundaries between his stage character and the man himself were rather thinner than most observers might have imagined.

The self-styled "ABECEDARIAN" created his unique name of Love 22 after becoming familiar with occult number tables in the classic 1928 book *The Secret Teachings of all Ages* by the Canadian-born mystic and author Manly P Hall (see FT255:44-49). In particular, he made use of the following esoteric Pythagorean number-grid, which 'magically' assigns single-digit numerical values to each

LEFT: Love 22, the Presidential candidate formerly known as Lawrence Wagner, on the campaign trail.

of the 26 letters in the alphabet, based upon which vertical column they appear in:

By looking up the word 'LOVE' in this table, you will find that 'L' is worth three points, 'O' six points, 'V' four points, and 'E' five points. Then, add these numbers together. You will find that  $3+6+4+5 = 18$ . Yes, that's right... 18. Not 22. Quite an anti-climax. But if you then add 2 to 18, and then another 2, you will get 22; and 22 is, in a written sense, just a 2 plus another 2, like those two 2s you just added onto 18, thus meaning that the name 'Love 22' does actually add up to the magic number of 22... if looked at in a highly idiosyncratic way, at any rate. Or, as Mr 22 himself puts it, using his own unique system of syntax and punctuation: "What 'LOVE 22' wants to do is: (TO TEACH YOU HOW IT 'ADDS-UP-2...') you guessed it... '22'!"

By use of such an "Ancient Technique in developing and realising Logic & Truth", Love 22 claims to have proved that the number 22 "symbolises the 'MASTER' vibration of the '22' Divine Channels of the Cosmic Universe". Any word, he says, which adds up to 22 based upon his chosen magic grid, represents "the Harmony, Order and Peace" of the cosmos. Some of the words with a numerical value of 22 – which, as Love 22 points out on his interesting website, are indeed rather portentous – include 'BIBLES' ( $2+9+2+3+5+1$ ), 'GURU' ( $7+3+9+3$ ) and 'BUDDHA' ( $2+3+4+4+8+1$ ). However, when you consider that some of the other words whose letters add up to 22 in this system include 'FOOD' ( $6+6+6+4$ ), 'BAR-B-Q' ( $2+1+9+2+8$ ) and 'PIES' ( $7+9+5+1$ ), you may well conclude that mankind's rumbling stomach forms the entire basis of Creation instead.

Nonetheless, Love 22 noticed that many words relevant to his former career as a schoolteacher had a numerical value of 22 as well, such as 'STUDENT' ( $1+2+3+4+5+5+2$ ) and 'LESSONS' ( $3+5+1+1+6+5+1$ ). When he added other pieces to the puzzle, such as the realisation that his mother's birthday was on the 22nd of the month, and that he had once possessed the number 22 shirt in his college football team, it became as easy as "ABC and 123" (a phrase which, when added up, also



# CRAZY LITTLE THING CALLED LOVE

equals 22) for him to realise that the number 22 ruled his entire life.

The strange thing was, it also seemed to rule the life of the 'UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT' (a phrase with 22 letters in it), in any number of ways. For example, the letters in the words 'USA FLAG' add up to 22, the same number of letters as are in the term 'FORMER WHITE HOUSE INTERN', a standard way of describing Monica Lewinski who, when she famously went down on Bill Clinton inside the Oval Office, was only 22 years old. Spookily, George Washington, the first American President, was born on 22 February 1732, while John F Kennedy died on 22 November 1963, his Vice-President and successor Lyndon B Johnson followed him six feet under on 22 January 1973, and his great rival Richard M Nixon croaked on 22 April 1994.

As if that wasn't enough, when John Brinkley tried to shoot Ronald Reagan back in the 1980s, he did so with a .22 revolver. Admittedly, Reagan actually died on 5 June 2004, not 22 June, and no other Presidents have been born or died on the 22nd of any month of the year, but still... it makes you think, doesn't it? Well, doesn't it?

It certainly made Love 22 think – it made him think some very odd thoughts indeed. What, for example, could have been the cosmic significance of 1984's Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to no less a figure than Archbishop Desmond Tutu – or 'Desmond 2-2', as it surely should have been spelled? This was two, two good to be true, as was that fact that, when Love 22 decided to measure his own head one day, he found that its circumference was a highly significant 22 inches! What was going on? Picking up the bestselling trash-weepee novel *Love Story*, whose title could perhaps be taken as referring directly to him, our hero found it had 22 chapters; flicking through the Bible, he found the last entry was Revelation 22; consulting a weights and measures table, he

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	

LEFT: The Pythagorean number table used by Love 22 to determine the numerological significance of everything from 'FOOD' and 'BAR-B-Q' to 'SALARY' and 'WORK', and thus the economic secret of the Universe.

found there were 2.2 pounds to a kilo; buying a postage-stamp, he was asked to hand over 22 cents. What would this all lead 2?

## 22 SKIDOO!

Love 22's ultimate conclusion about all this 22-related weirdness was clearly influenced by that damascene moment in 1970 when he first realised that there was something seriously wrong with the American financial system. Seeing as '9 TO 5' added up to 22, as did words like 'SALARY', 'WORK' and 'CHECK' (as in the US spelling of 'pay cheque'), Love 22 began to realise that the rightful basis of the American economy was the number 22. So why were there no \$22 bills? There soon would be! Embarking upon his long and unsuccessful political career, Love 22 called his new political vehicle the 'Independent Greenback Party', presumably after the 19th-century Greenback Party, who had once sought to encourage the growing separation of the US paper dollar from the nation's proven gold reserves, thereby increasing the nation's money supplies and devaluing the currency for the benefit of debtors.

During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln – not born on the 22nd of any month – had daringly uncoupled the value of the dollar from gold in order to fund the conflict with so-called 'greenbacks'; however, in 1875 the link between the dollar and precious metals was somewhat restored by the government's Specie Resumption Act, something the original Greenback Party aimed to put an end to. Love 22's own aim, of course, was to reverse this process of decoupling dollars

from gold, not promote it, so it can only be guessed that his adoption of this 'Greenback' name for his organisation (of which I'd imagine he was the only actual member) was meant to be ironic, or else simply an attempt to link himself back to better-known monetary reform movements of the past.

Nonetheless, some of his manifesto promises down the years do seem to have had a certain genuine critical heft behind them, most notably his oft-repeated 'Proposition 22', which promised to "axe taxes", and his inventive proposal to pay off the entire US national debt by using truckloads of his fake \$22 bills. These may seem like joke policies, but they do in fact both relate back to Love 22's seemingly genuine distaste for the near-total modern day uncoupling of the US dollar from the piles of wholly physical gold which lie within Fort Knox. In Love 22's view, the Federal bonds that back up the billions of dollar bills currently in circulation are a gigantic and almost metaphysical exercise in making money appear from out of nowhere – meaning that the tax dollars being paid back to the US Government by its citizens are effectively worthless, rather like the fake notes which are handed back over to the banker by people playing Monopoly. Love 22 never specifically says "restore the Gold Standard!" but it does sound like this is what he wants to happen.

According to this line of thought, to 'axe all taxes' makes about as much sense as the US Treasury continuing to call in their fake tax revenues, seeing as the amount of real, gold-backed money collected by Washington every year, as opposed to false bond-backed money, is miniscule anyway. Besides combatting inflation, harsh measures being taken to stem the amount of fake non-gold-linked cash



ABOVE: Examples of Love 22's funny money: \$22 banknotes, featuring a 22-windowed White House and Love 22 as Uncle Sam.





in circulation throughout America will also have the added benefit of helping to save all the 'TREES' ( $2+9+5+5+1=22$ ) which are currently being cut down to make so many unnecessary printed notes. The idea of paying off America's national debt in \$22 bills also makes a kind of sense, at least in the weird world of Love 22. Obviously, \$22 bills do not exist; but neither, to Love 22, does the quasi-imaginary US dollar, at least not since its reckless uncoupling from the nation's gold reserves. Therefore, when the Government does pay off part of its debt, Love 22 would presumably argue that it is doing so using non-existent cash in any case, so why not just print billions worth of openly fraudulent \$22 bills and use those to get the country out of the red? It's all pretend money anyway, so what's the difference? That would certainly be one way for Washington to get out of hock to its main modern-day debt-holder nation of China – financial payback, maybe, for their unleashing of what Donald Trump habitually calls the 'Chinese Virus'.

## MONEY CAN'T BUY YOU LOVE

The fact that the phrase 'THERE WAS NO GOLD OR SILVER' has – yes! – 22 letters in it provided the final proof that Love 22 was correct to pursue this noble monetary crusade. With such indisputable evidence to hand, he seems proud of the fact that his novelty \$22 bills – which he sells to the public, slightly hypocritically, in return for real money – have been accepted or cashed over 500 times down the years, even though they are the most blatantly obvious fakes imaginable. With images of Love 22's grinning Uncle Sam-disguised face on them, together with copies of the occult Pythagorean number-table he makes such good use of and a picture of the White House which is labelled so as to demonstrate that its front side has 22 visible windows and doors, they are really not very realistic items at all. Despite their obvious novelty character, however, one of Love 22's \$22 bills was once accidentally used by a miscreant to pay a \$20 traffic-fine in a courtroom in Hamilton, Montana, with the funny money slipping past the eyes of an unobservant judge, and various jokers have successfully used them in shops to pay for goods; one particularly dim check-out assistant actually handed the bearer \$21 in real change, following a \$1 purchase made with one.

Such wilful sabotage of the US economy could not be allowed to go unpunished forever, of course, and in 1981 Love 22



ABOVE: Vermin Supreme campaigning for the Free Pony Party in 2016.

finally came to face the full force of the law. Attending that year's New Orleans Mardi Gras and selling fistfuls of false dollars to revellers, he was apprehended by Federal Agents and charged with counterfeiting. His defence was quite simple; no such thing as a \$22 bill existed, so how could he possibly have forged one? If anything, he had invented a new form of currency, not imitated one. The presiding magistrate, Ingard Johannesen, agreed, adding that "any nit-wit" could tell that the notes were not real legal tender, and dismissed the case. Then again, Love 22 knew all along that he would; Johannesen's office phone number began with the digits '589', which added up to... yes ... 22. So, the law never did Catch 22.

By now in his eighties, you would think Love 22 would perhaps have taken a well-earned retirement from America's political and economic scene; after all, he's not 22 anymore. Biden and Trump are 78 and 74 respectively themselves, though, so age no longer seems a barrier to pursuing a career at the very top of US politics. And so, in December 2015, Love 22 was to be found debating his policy platform against a long-bearded gentleman wearing a wellington-boot on his head and calling himself 'Vermin Supreme' on a regional US TV station – and this in preparation for a tilt at the 2016 electoral contest.

Mr Supreme is a satirical comedy candidate, roughly equivalent to the UK's late Screaming Lord Sutch of the Monster Raving Loony Party, who habitually carries around a giant toothbrush and claims that, if elected President, he will pass a law forcing people to regularly brush their teeth. He is most famous for pledging to prepare the nation for a potential zombie apocalypse, proposing to fund time-travel research, and promising to distribute a free pony to every American (or every American who wants

one at any rate; presumably the scheme would not be compulsory). From 2012 until 2016, Vermin headed up the 'Free Pony Party' and clearly campaigns in a spirit of jest – and yet there is a serious purpose behind the joke, relating to the necessary gradual abolition of various Government services in favour of self-reliant anarchism; but let's not discuss all that here.

Given that Love 22 agreed to debate this odd fellow on TV, does this indicate that, really, he is basically a fake candidate too, a mere entertainer? Or is this just putting  $2 + 2$  together and getting 5? If his life's work has been just a never-ending prank, then it certainly seems like an elaborate and

rather self-destructive one to have pursued for nearly five decades...

So, was this Love for real? It would be nice to find out the answer to this conundrum, but it is possible that Love 22 is now on Cloud Nine (divide 22 by 2, then subtract 2 to see how I have deduced this), so you might have to live at 22B Baker Street to be able to solve the mystery for good. An interview he gave to a local newspaper in summer 2019 indicated he intended to contest the 2020 election, but that was before the pandemic broke out, and I have been unable to find any record of him subsequently actually doing any campaigning. Given that he is bang in the middle of the vulnerable age category for Covid-19, and that around 220,000 people have so far died from it in the States, let us hope that Love 22's career is not brought to a premature end by the pandemic; it would have been much more apt for him to be taken out by the third numbered coronavirus down the line (Covid-22, that is).

Love's website is still up and running, but has no mention at all of any 2020 presidential campaign – if only he had waded into battle against the decrepit duo of Joe and Donald more openly, political and financial history alike might have been so much different. Let us hope therefore that his final \$22 cheque has not yet been cashed by the 'LORD' ( $3+9+6+4=22$ ). Otherwise, we may never be able to hear again his stirring electoral rallying-cry that "A vote for Love is a vote for you. Yabba-Addabba-Adieu!"

## NOTES

Compiled from: Donna Kossy, *Kooks: A Guide to the Outer Limits of Human Belief* (Feral House, 1994) p.229; [www.love22.com/index.html](http://www.love22.com/index.html) (and other, subsequent pages on Love-22's website); [www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/07/And-By-The-Way-Prankster-Love-22-enters-gubernatorial-race/3471392270400/](http://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/06/07/And-By-The-Way-Prankster-Love-22-enters-gubernatorial-race/3471392270400/); [www.providencejournal.com/news/20190720/mark-patinkin-for-ris-love-22-life-is-quirky-numbers-game/](http://www.providencejournal.com/news/20190720/mark-patinkin-for-ris-love-22-life-is-quirky-numbers-game/); <http://keysnews.com/node/66381>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vermin\\_Supreme](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vermin_Supreme)





## The psychedelic shift

**BOB FISCHER** ponders when – and why – the Establishment became the foe of the otherworldly on British television.

I'm beginning to wonder whether a crucial cultural shift is epitomised most tellingly in 1960s *Doctor Who*. In the 1967 story "The Abominable Snowmen", Patrick Troughton's Doctor lands the TARDIS in 1930s Tibet and befriends Professor Edward Travers, an anthropologist searching for evidence of the Yeti. Admittedly, most of the story is spent defeating fake, robotic Yeti under the guidance of an alien "Great Intelligence", but – crucially – Travers is presented as an Establishment figure, a reputable scientist on a mission.

But in the 1968 sequel story "The Web of Fear" – in which said robotic Yeti have taken over the London Underground – an older Travers is featured, and his character is very different. In 1960s Britain, Travers has become an eccentric outsider, completely at odds with the Establishment. He's recruited to work with the British Army, but he doesn't trust them and they don't trust him. He's a maverick... and he gets results.

When did the depiction of those with an interest in the 'unexplained' shift in popular culture? It's possible to argue that the transformation of Travers's character simply depicts changes in attitude between the 1930s and the 1960s, but I wonder if it also reflects a fast-moving cultural shift between 1967 and 1968.

Representation of the Yeti makes for a decent case study, actually. The 1955 BBC play *The Creature*, written by Nigel Kneale, sees Peter Cushing leading an expedition into the Himalayan mountains to investigate stories of this mysterious beastie. Sadly,



ABOVE: In *Doctor Who*, Professor Travers went from establishment figure to eccentric maverick. RIGHT: Peter Cushing played a scientist in search of the Yeti in *The Abominable Snowman*.

the show no longer exists, but we can get a taste of it by watching the cinema adaptation that Kneale wrote for Hammer in 1957, retitled *The Abominable Snowman*.

ITV swiftly reciprocated. In the second episode of their 1956 drama *Colonel March of Scotland Yard*, puzzle-solver March (Boris Karloff) seemingly finds a Yeti footprint in the snow outside his Whitehall Place office! And, as with Kneale's script, the original Himalayan folk tales are treated respectfully, with the existence of the Yeti accepted as fact by these Establishment figures. Peter Cushing's character is a respected scientist, Colonel March works for Scotland Yard, and neither of them dismisses the stories as bunkum: they embrace them open-mindedly, and look to find the truth behind them. Attitudes echoed by other Establishment heroes of the era, when confronted with the otherworldly, such as Kneale's own Bernard Quatermass, introduced in 1953, and intrepid cosmologist John Fleming, from *A For Andromeda* (1961).

But did the emergence of the hippie counter-culture, reaching



its apotheosis in 1967, change these attitudes? Did this new generation of 'turned-on' young people and outsiders reject the Establishment and claim the 'unexplained' as their own, to the exclusion of the old order? The marginalisation of Professor Travers and his beliefs in "The Web of Fear" suggests that the transition might already have been underway by 1968.

By the 1970s, and the explosion of supernaturally-themed television for children, the shift seems complete. It's difficult to watch huge swathes of 1970s TV without concluding that it's been infiltrated by a counter-culture mentality that absolutely believes in the *otherness* of the supernatural, and is no longer presenting such matters as merely unidentified elements of a rational scientific universe. If anything, they are the antithesis of this. The otherworldly is often depicted as a *rejection* of the Establishment, the refuge of kids

who *believe*, or have themselves been infused with distilled essence of the supernatural: see *The Owl Service* (1969), *The Tomorrow People* (1973-79) or *Raven* (1977).

Elsewhere, otherworldly figures are befriended by children who must hide them from the adult world: see *Catweazle* (1970-71), *Sky* (1975) and *Nobody's House* (1976). And in other shows (1977's *Children of the Stones*, for example) the uncanny becomes the *raison d'être* of entire communities who have divorced themselves from mainstream society. Everywhere, flared-trousered kids are surrounded by folk myth, strange powers and assorted ghosts and beasties... and such things are presented as an exciting alternative to mainstream rationalism. Authority figures (parents, teachers, policemen, and yes, Establishment scientists) are frequently stupid, cynical or naive. Even *Doctor Who*'s crack alien-fighting taskforce UNIT (founded after the events of "The Web of Fear") is increasingly depicted as a collection of loveable bumblers as the decade wears on.

I'm unsure as to the specifics of this cultural shift, but I'd be intrigued to hear any thoughts. Was the Establishment already backing away from the otherworldly by the late 1960s, at which point the counter-culture swooped to claim it as its own? Or did the counterculture annexe the otherworldly as part of the psychedelic revolution... at which point the Establishment backed off and decided it really couldn't be associated with this stuff any more? Carve any thoughts on your nearest stone circle, and telepathically transmit the location to me...

♦ **BOB FISCHER** is the writer of FT's 'Haunted Generation' column and an enthusiast of folklore, strange music and retro pop culture. He blogs at [www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk](http://www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk).



## Dogmatism be damned!

**IAN JAMES KIDD**  
catalogues the various intellectual vices explored and deplored by Charles Fort and asks what alternative modes of thought Fort encouraged in his own writings.

**A**rrogance and dogmatism are hot news, right now. Alongside ‘post-truth’ politics, scorning of experts, and the orange hubris occupying the White House, these are propitious times for those interested in bad intellectual behaviour. Examples include: ignoring uncomfortable evidence, dismissing alternative ways of thinking, and insisting on the unquestionability of entrenched convictions. All of these are, naturally, red rags to seasoned forteans. Charles Fort lambasted ‘Dogmatic Science’, describing *The Book of the Damned* as offering “little lessons upon the beauties of modesty and humility” for the enjoyment and edification of those who liked listening to “the hiss of escaping arrogance” (BD 13).<sup>1</sup>

Philosophers have started to get in on the act, albeit focused on questions of truth and political arrogance, rather than arraying notes upon falls of fish and frogs. A useful product of their interest is the concept of an *intellectual vice*. Most people are familiar with *moral vices* – the bad character traits, like cruelty, insensitivity, and selfishness – and the corresponding moral virtues, like compassion, honesty, and kindness. But there are also intellectual virtues, virtues of the mind, character traits that make us *good thinkers*. Some virtues of the mind are good because they’ll tend to create good effects – imaginativeness, for instance, helps us generate new ways of



LEFT: Charles Fort, scourge of dogmatism and other intellectual vices.

thinking and understanding. Other virtues of the mind reflect good motives, such as a love of truth for its own sake, the heart of the virtue of curiosity. Sometimes a virtue will have good effects and express good motives.

A philosophical fortean, though, would likely want to focus on the *vices of the mind*, those character traits that make us *bad thinkers*. Scouring Fort’s writings, there are many: arrogance, closedmindedness, dogmatism, gullibility, inflexibility, stupidity... to name a few. Sometimes, his jibes were provoked by the intellectually vicious behaviour of individuals. In other cases, the target was broader – ‘Dogmatic Science’ or the *Zeistgeist*-like ‘Dominants’. As readers of *FT* know well, a good fortean frowns at dogmatism, whether in its sceptical or credulous forms. By doing so, we

*His task was to act as “a gadfly on the hide of orthodox science”*

follow Fort himself, described by an early admirer as “the least dogmatic of men” whose self-assigned task was to “act as a gadfly on the hide of orthodox science, to sting it awake.”<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes, Fort emphasises the ways that individuals can acquire certain vices from their wider culture – a dogmatising culture, which, through a sort of “hypnotising process”, becomes “dominant over the majority of minds in their era”. (BD 1) Many of our individual vices are acquired from our environments,

then kept in place by them. In a prescient flash of sociology of science, Fort went into details about these dogmatising forces. Commenting on some of his earlier data, he realised “the great number of times that the *American Journal of Science* and the *Report of the British Association* are quoted: note that, after, say, 1885, they’re scarcely mentioned in these inspired but illicit pages”. (BD 17) Worse, such “throttle and disregard” wasn’t due to lack of data. Fort quotes the editor of *The Zoologist*, admitting to “continually” receiving reports of falls of fish and frogs, then ruefully remarks that barely a handful were published. (BD 7)

Is this dogmatism? Well, naturally, that depends on your definition. According to one of the best current philosophical takes, dogmatism is “an unwillingness to engage seriously with relevant alternatives to a belief one already holds”. A dogmatist ignores alternatives, or derides those who voice them, or works hard to destroy or marginalise any evidence that’s liable to help people find and explore those alternatives. All of this effort is motivated by the desire of a dogmatist to protect their current beliefs, whether out of idleness, complacency, or some other intellectually vicious motive, like indifference to the truth.<sup>3</sup> If the editor of *The Zoologist* failed to publish the reports out of a desire to protect an entrenched belief, then a charge of dogmatism might be justified. Throttle and disregard, indeed.

Although Fort stated his target as ‘dogmatism’, I think it was actually something very closely related, if broader in scope: *closedmindedness*. The difference is simple: dogmatism is being closedminded about

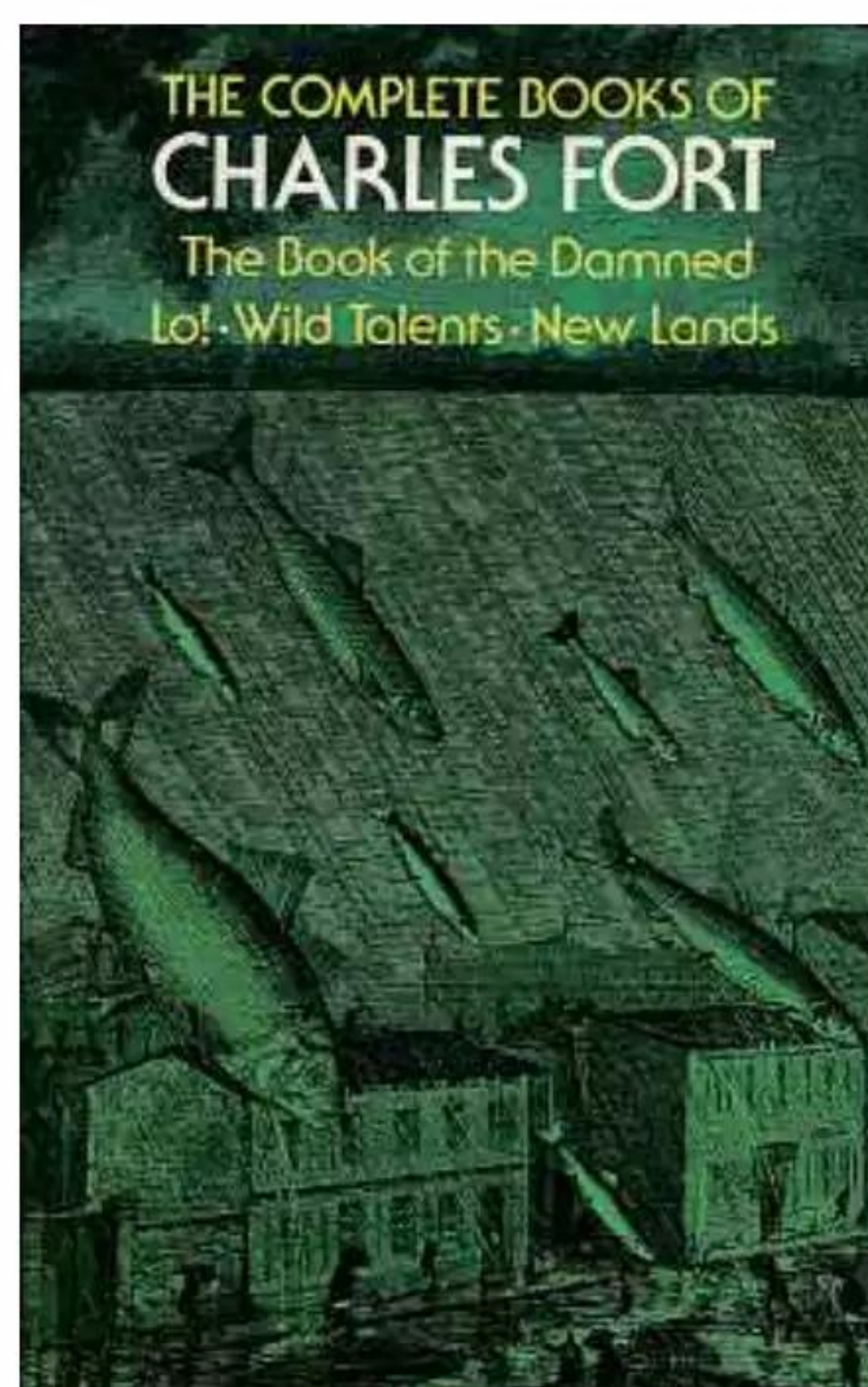




your beliefs, being closed to the possibility of their being false or in need of revision. By contrast, closedmindedness is a broader unwillingness or inability to engage seriously with relevant intellectual options, whether alternative beliefs, ideas, ways of thinking, or perspectives. Certainly, this fits many of Fort's remarks, like his warning that "firmly to believe is to impede development" or his astute aphorism, "The fate of all explanation is to close one door only to have another fly wide open." (BD 1, 4).

Open doors were clearly a favourite metaphor. Writing a decade later in *Lo!*, Fort was to declare his commitment to "shut the front door upon Christ and Einstein, and at the back door hold out a welcoming hand to little frogs and periwinkles." (*Lo!* 1.3) Open-mindedness, on this view, requires a double movement – closing the door on the entrenched certainties that have the power to 'hypnotise', 'throttle and disregard', while also opening one's door to the 'procession of the damned' that marches through the pages of Fort's books (or, indeed, this august publication). If this selective opening and closing of doors encourages in us an ability to engage more seriously with alternative beliefs, perspectives, and ways of thinking, then it helps us overcome our intellectual vices. Fort's early celebrants all praised this aspect of his writing, from pondering souls like Theodore Dreiser to zealous cranks like Tiffany Thayer.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever you think of all these edifying sentiments, there's a deep problem, one I'm not sure was ever really addressed by Fort. Simply put – why bother working so hard to be open-minded? After all, dogmatism can be highly productive, directing our limited attention and energies onto specific, tractable problems. Floating questions and possibilities, after all, often impede enquiry. Sometimes, unquestioning acceptance is required if we're to get the work done. Closedmindedness, too, offers similar advantages, including that unruffled sense of



quiet confidence in established ways of thinking. So – why open that door to those frogs and periwinkles?

A standard style of answer is tempting. Closedmindedness and dogmatism will lead, inevitably if not immediately, to our ruin. In the long term, openmindedness ensures an appropriate degree of "cognitive contact with reality", as one philosopher puts it.<sup>5</sup> It's only by exercising the intellectual virtues – curiosity, humility, openmindedness – that we keep in touch with reality. Without that, our beliefs drift away from reality, and that sets us up for an eventual catastrophe. Intellectual vices like closedmindedness are therefore doubly bad: they make us bad thinkers and, in the process, will tend to make our lives go badly.

The British philosopher Quassim Cassam calls this view *obstructivism*. Intellectual vices obstruct our ability to gain, keep, and share the knowledge and understanding without which our personal and collective lives go very badly.<sup>6</sup> In philosophical jargon, this is a kind of *consequentialism*: we assess the goodness or badness of something depending on its typical consequences. The vices are character traits that tend to have bad effects. Intellectual vices, for instance, lead us to ignore salient pieces of information, for instance, or wrongfully rule out certain legitimate ways of interpreting data.

I think Fort agreed with this – up to a point. But bemoaning

the bad consequences of closedminded dogmatism doesn't go far enough. As I read *The Book of the Damned* and its sequels, there's a constant sense of *indignation* about intellectually vicious behaviour. The bad effects are bad, for sure, but, deep down, it's just *plain wrong* for people to 'damn' this data, prematurely collapse these possibilities, and errantly derogate those people with the courage to report what they saw. We see this clearest, perhaps, in a letter Fort wrote to the sci-fi writer, Maynard Shipley, thanking him for his review of *Lo!* "I am very much encouraged with your review, the spirit of which is – discount what you will, something remains, just the same."<sup>7</sup>

Those last nine words gesture to something deeper than practical worries about bad effects, like hastily ruling out possible hypotheses. It might be called a *respect for reality*, an appreciation that reality has a shape or integrity of its own which ought to be acknowledged. An old name for what Fort was criticising is *hubris*. The successes of science of the 19<sup>th</sup> century encouraged an overconfidence in our powers of enquiry – something clear in warnings by pragmatists, phenomenologists and other philosophers active during Fort's lifetime. What they questioned was not the *value* of science, but our sense of its *limits*. Granted, those are ever-changing in the light of new technologies and discoveries, and ever-moving boundaries are hard to track.

Fort worried about tendencies to ground the authority of science in an inflated sense of its achievement and current powers. Such systematic tendencies to overconfidence fuel hubris. They include various ways of rigging the game, like recording science's successes, but ignoring its failures by 'damning' the troublesome data. Fort's sharpest quips, again, gather around this worry about hubris. My favourite: "Science is very much like the Civil War in the USA. No matter which side won, it would have been an American victory." (*Lo!* 1.11). Science as it was developing in Fort's day seemed to evince increasing

patterns of dogmatism, and closedmindedness, and hubris – hence that term, 'Dogmatic Science'.

Fort's scorn for the intellectual vices reflects a conviction that we ought to have due respect for reality. In the face of our dogmatic assertions and attempted damnations, it will push back and resist. *The Book of the Damned* puts it characteristically well, when sketching its vision of the relentless march of the masses of damned data: "The little harlots will caper, and freaks will distract attention, and the clowns will break the rhythm of the whole with their buffooneries – but the solidity of the procession as a whole: the impressiveness of things that pass and pass and pass, and keep on and keep on and keep on coming." (BD 1).

A stance of dogmatic, closedminded, hubris aims at denying or disrupting this weird procession. Fort therefore counsels a different stance: to suspend the urge to demand that reality be a certain way, to acknowledge the complexity of the world, and open a door to the frogs and periwinkles. Exercising such intellectual virtues means being open to the world in the ways taught by Fort.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All references to Fort's books are to chapter numbers, and to part and chapter of *Lo!*

<sup>2</sup> Miriam Allen DeFord, 'Charles Fort: *Enfant Terrible* of Science', *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Jan 1954: 105-116, quoting p.107

<sup>3</sup> Heather Battaly, 'Can Closed-mindedness be an Intellectual Virtue?', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 84 (2018): 23-45.

<sup>4</sup> Mike Dash, 'Charles Fort and a man named Dreiser', **FT51:40-48**, (1998) and Doug Skinner, 'Doubting Tiffany', **FT200:48-52** (2005).

<sup>5</sup> Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 100.

<sup>6</sup> Quassim Cassam, *Vices of the Mind* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in DeFord, 'Charles Fort: *Enfant Terrible* of Science', 111.

♦ IAN JAMES KIDD is lecturer in philosophy at the University of Nottingham and has a longstanding interest in Fort's life and work.



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## Reassessing the miraculous

This new study of miracles is sane, erudite and engrossing, says **Bob Rickard**, and suggests we need to study anomalous phenomena seriously rather than simply dismissing them

### Smile of the Universe

**Miracles in an Age of Disbelief**

Michael Grosso

Anomalist Books 2020

Pb, £12, 228pp, ISBN 9781949501131

A new book about miracles might seem a throwback, conjuring up a boringly predictable debate about why God is willing to annoy rationalist materialists by interfering with his own creation. Worry no further! Here's a sane, erudite and engrossing study that banishes the mists of eschatological obfuscation to say something fresh and relevant to modern readers. Michael Grosso wants "to save miracles from the dogmatic clutches of *both* religion and science" (my emphasis).

*Smile of the Universe* – a study of "miracles in an age of disbelief" – is the culmination of Grosso's thoughtful inquiries into paranormal experiences over several books. Among a broad spectrum of examples, some are given in greater detail, because of better historical documentation – such as the careful observations of the spiritualistic, mystical and PK phenomena of the Victorian medium DD Home. Home was closely experimented upon by the physicist Sir William Crookes, who kept meticulous records.

Another such example is the extraordinary "Convulsionaires" of the Parisian parish of St Médard in the mid-18th century. These penitents fell into collective ecstasies (or "fits") in which they ranted, contorted, felt no

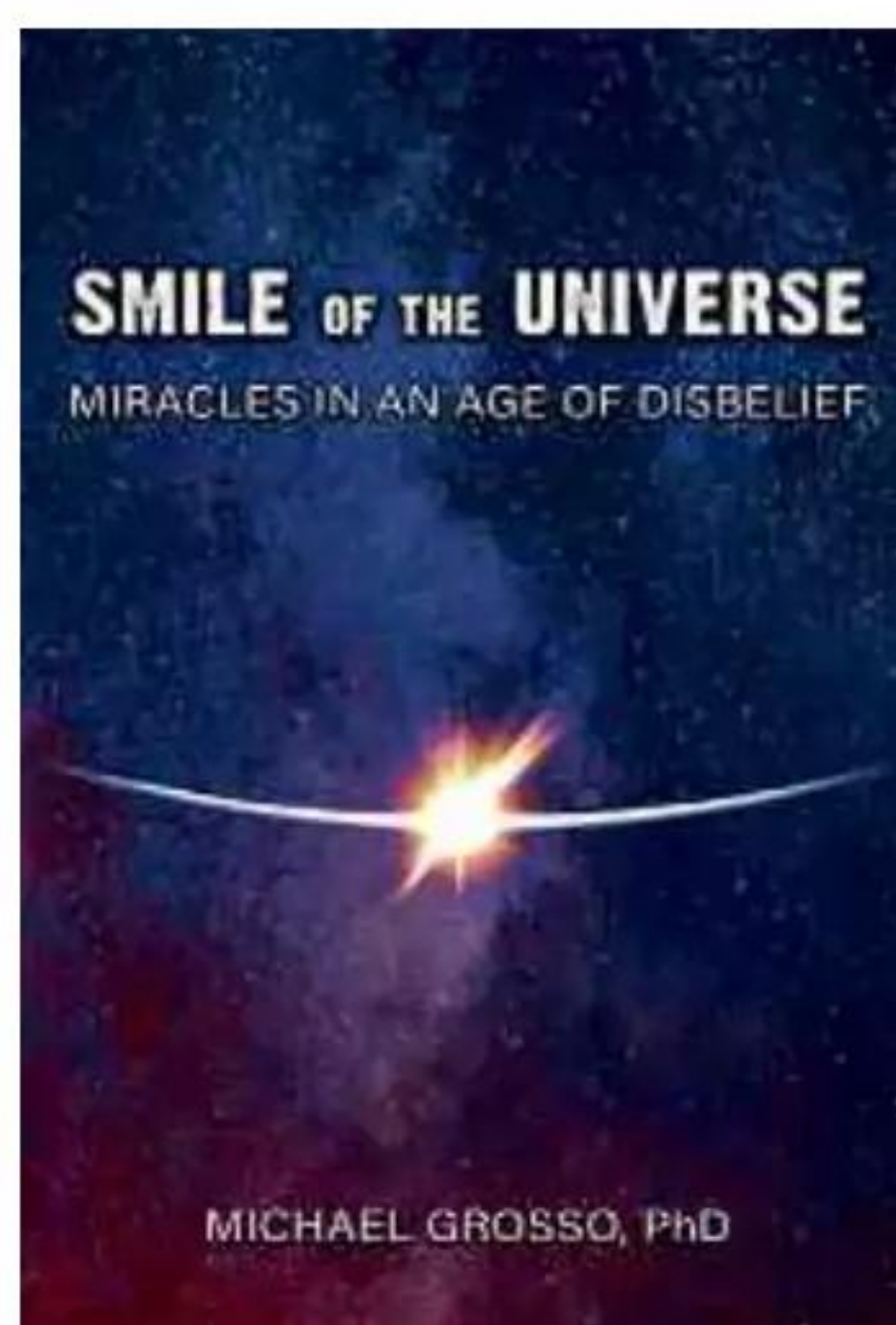
pain from beating, cutting or crucifixion, and in which some were seen levitating. Importantly, the affair generated a wealth of documentation from the city's clergy, police and courts, and was investigated and discussed by scientists, philosophers and other intellectuals.

The prodigious levitation phenomena of St Joseph of Cupertino (1603-1663) – the subject of Grosso's previous two books – is another detailed case in point. Based upon more than 150 depositions (under oath) of witnesses and diaries kept by those who were close to him for decades, his levitations probably numbered thousands. (In the last six years of his life it is said to have happened daily.) Many involved great height and prolonged duration. He was examined by the Inquisition, and eventu-

ally canonised. Significantly, St Joseph was closely studied and discussed by doctors, scholars and philosophers, providing an exceptional archive of evidence.

Grosso begins the book with an account of his own encounter with a so-called "miracle" in October 1994.

He visited an icon, in a Greek Orthodox church in the NY district of Astoria, that wept "tears" and had been doing so, periodically, for 14 years. He examined it closely in the light of several theories of how it could be "faked", and was told that the priests were willing for its exudations to be tested. Something was happening which deserved investigation and explanation and not knee-jerk mockery or rejection.



### *Miracles happen, not in opposition to nature, but in opposition to what we know of nature*

Grosso rejects the all-encompassing and generally useless word "supernatural". ESP, he says, should not be considered automatically as something "supernatural", but "an aspect of our natural endowment that we don't fully understand yet". Similarly, he argues that what are termed "miracles" might be more usefully thought of as "paranormal events that occur in the context of religious belief, symbols and experience", perhaps even as an anomaly in the normal train of cause and effect. Shifts of emphasis of this sort could soften a rationalist's strict physicalism enough to allow "paranormal" to mean simply "beyond any type of known physical causation".

For anyone with honest curiosity who takes the time to look, there are data out there worthy of serious consideration, however rare and anomalous they may be. It is no longer good enough to dismiss, *a priori*, well-supported cases of anomalous phenomena and experiences without seeking out the best available evidence. They should be studied seriously, without prejudice, as a good scientist is supposed to do, but which many so-called scientific-rationalist "skeptics" seem too disdainful or reluctant to attempt.

Historically, miracles were solely a divine prerogative; demons, witches and wizards could only imitate them by trickery.

St Augustine's idea was quite modern: that "miracles happen, not in opposition to nature, but in opposition to *what we know* of nature," (my emphasis). It is only now that we are in sight of what that might mean. Grosso concludes that "we are all part of one mind but are separated by our bodies."

Rather than focus upon the philosophical and methodological divide between "science" and "what-is-excluded-from-that-science" – what Andrew Lang called "the war of two sisters" – Grosso discusses in detail an extensive range of phenomena with which "science" has failed to engage, except to argue that they have no reality or causation within the "scientific" doctrines of physicality and materialism. Grosso shows us that there is indeed reality and causation outside what we know of Nature. Miracles, then, take us beyond physicalism and "seem to indicate possibilities for the future evolution of mankind". To go further with this hypothesis, we need to develop better means of dialogue with what Myers called "Mind at Large".

The tools of this new "science" might emerge from a greater knowledge of such things as poltergeists, psychical automatisms, shamanic phenomena, synchronicity and interconnectedness and experiments in multiple consciousness; in other words, subjects characterised by interaction with the mind creating meaningfulness. A disturbing yet strangely exciting prospect.

Grosso's prose is clear, methodical, and open-minded, and like Fort, exhorts us to have confidence in questioning limitations set by others, because "miracles violate nothing but intellectual provincialism".



# After death we go...?

Most Christians today believe something very different from what Jesus taught

## Heaven and Hell

A History of the Afterlife

Bart D Ehrman

Oneworld 2020

Hb, 352pp, £20, ISBN 9781786077202

Many Christians believe that their doctrines sprang fully-formed from the Jewish origins of Christianity. But if this were so, many beliefs would be very different, including those about Heaven and Hell – where we go (if anywhere) after we die.

Bart Ehrman has written many popular books on early Christianity and its variant forms. His latest might puzzle some: why devote the first 80 pages to Greek beliefs? The answer is simple: the greatest influence on culture and philosophy in the Holy Land at the time of Jesus was Greek. Everyone with any education spoke Greek. The books of the New Testament were written in Greek.

Jewish and Christian beliefs on the afterlife were inevitably influenced by Greek beliefs.

What will be startling for Christians is that nowhere in the Old Testament can we find the traditional Christian views of the afterlife, writes Ehrman. The OT prophets were more concerned with the ultimate fate of the nation of Israel, not of individual people. Once beliefs about the fate of individuals did begin to develop, there was nothing about dying and going straight to Heaven or Hell, as most Christians today believe; Jewish apocalypticists (including Jesus) believed that “on the Day of Judgment... the righteous would be given eternal life and the wicked would be annihilated forever”.

The idea of immediate postmortem reward or punishment actually first surfaced in a Jewish apocryphal book, 4 Maccabees (first or second century AD), which

said that the wicked “will not simply stay dead but will be punished, tortured...” This eventually became standard Christian teaching – in complete contrast to Jesus’s teaching that the wicked should “fear the one who can annihilate both the soul and body in Gehenna”.

“By the second century very few followers of Jesus held to his own views of the afterlife,” says Ehrman.

The change from Jesus’s own teachings came because of the composition of early Christian communities “not of Jews raised on apocalyptic views of the coming judgment of God but of former pagans raised in Greek ways of looking at the world that stressed the immortality of the soul rather than the resurrection of the body. For such people, eternal life would involve

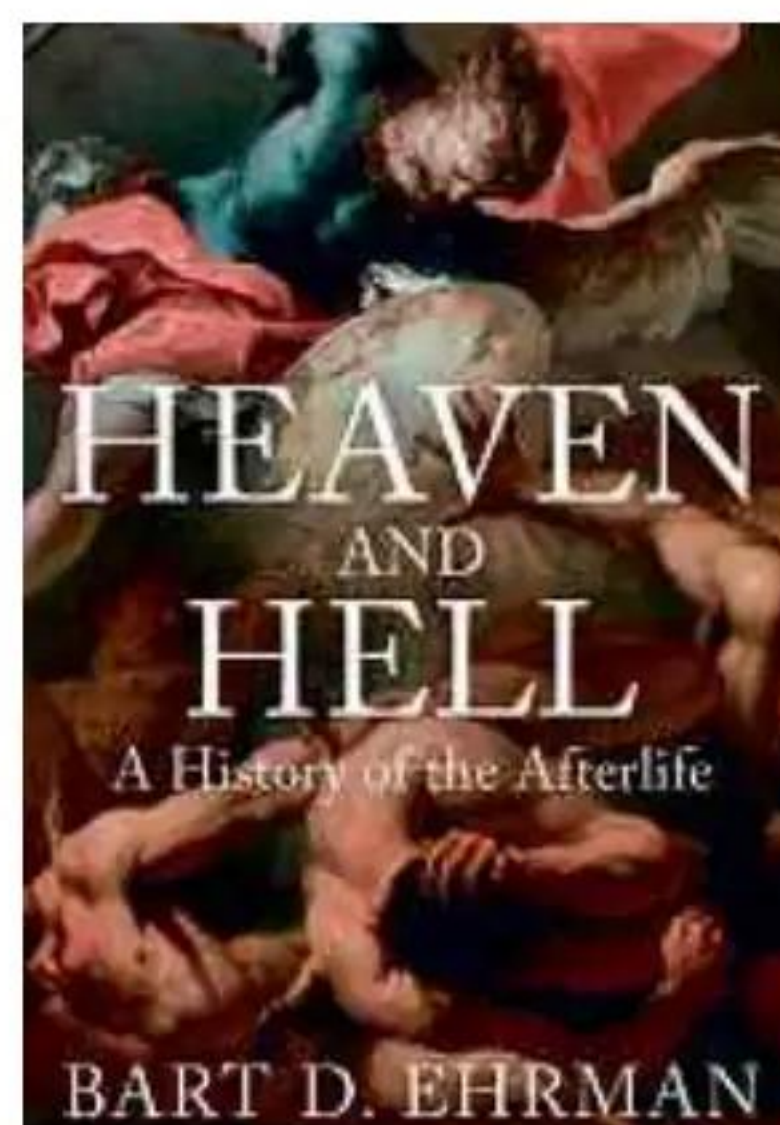
rewards and punishments after death.”

And the punishments became increasingly horrendous. The fourth or fifth-century Apocalypse of Paul sets out the penalties: “A presbyter who offered communion after committing fornication finds himself in a river of fire, tortured by angels vigorously piercing his intestines with a three-pronged iron instrument – for all time.” Delightful!

Ehrman doesn’t make this point, but there’s an astonishing irony that so many of the 19th-century Christian sects – Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christadelphians, Seventh-day Adventists and others – are condemned as heretics by mainstream Christianity for teaching what Jesus himself believed: that the unsaved are not tortured forever in hell, but are annihilated.

Jay Vickers

★★★★



## How to Walk on Water and Climb up Walls

Animal movement and the robots of the future

David L Hu

Princeton 2020

Pb, 248pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780691204161

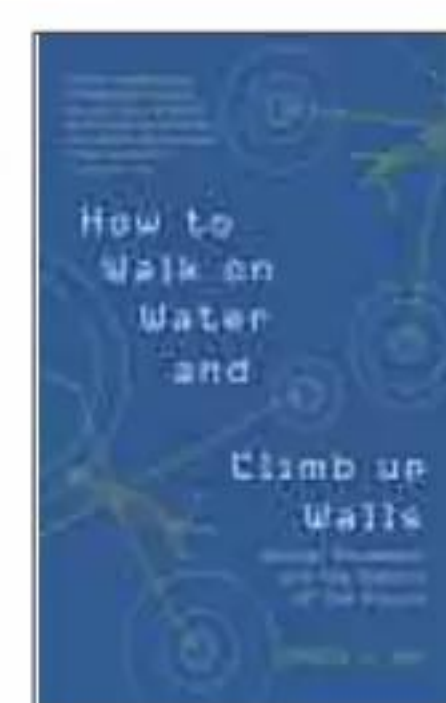
Opening with the author’s girlfriend’s poodle shaking itself to get dry, at a speed faster than a cornering Formula 1 car, *How to Walk... looks at nature’s various “non-intuitive yet effective” solutions to locomotion and humans’ attempts to replicate them. And yes – author David Hu, a professor of both mechanical engineering and biology, with his colleagues really did go on to build a highly efficient animal-shaking-itself-dry simulator, based on watching bears and pandas shake themselves dry at Atlanta Zoo.*

The water walkers of the title are insects including water striders that have been rowing across the surface of ponds on pontoon-like legs for 300 million years. Weighing in at just 10mg, their mass is “enough to bend but not break” the surface of the water, as they ride the waves they generate as they row. Invincible cockroaches can survive being squashed to half their height.

*How to Walk’s* robots are typically tiny – the “Robostrider” has a body cut from a tin can, wire legs and pulleys made from sock elastic. The thousand-strong phalanx of tiny K-Bots, programmed to form shapes like fire ants building bridges, are so small the varying weight of different types of solder used to weld them together affects their performance.

After a lot of experiments involving adding dye to tanks to see the eddies these creatures generate, Hu concludes many of these miracle movers ride the vortices they generate themselves as they undulate through air, water or even sand. Marine worms force open cracks as they move through dry mud and inflate themselves to create new cavities in wet mud.

Applications? Cockroach-style collapsible robots would be handy for search and rescue. Snake robots can enter hard-to-access human body cavities for medical procedures. A patch of loose sand



immobilised the Spirit Rover on Mars; could the toaster-sized H-Rex robot that jogs through sand do better?

There is much to engage the reader – like Hu travelling home on the Long Island Railroad from a reptile fair, 10 “affordable” snakes hidden in his jacket so he could watch them slither around his flat. But the narrative keeps switching between fun accounts of field work – taking delivery of a flying snake captured by the Singapore Police and chucking it off scaffolding towers to watch it fly, a bin filling up with failed downhill-walking robot parts – to frankly dull physics.

But there’s enough wonder, enough “So that’s how they do it!” moments – and enough descriptions of shaving the skin off a dead shark – to keep the reader’s interest.

Matt Salusbury

★★★★

## The Mystic Lamb

Admired and Stolen

Harry De Paepe & Jan Van Der Veken

SelfMadeHero 2020

Hb, 112pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781910593899

Printed on heavy paper, with elegantly restrained full-page illustrations in tones of steely blue or subdued russet, the crisp neatness of this book makes it pleasant to read and handle, but I’m not at all sure who it’s aimed at.

It offers a biography of the travels and travails of the 15th-century Flemish artists Jan and Hubert van Eyck’s most impressive painting, the 12-panelled altarpiece “Adoration of the Mystic Lamb” from the cathedral of St Bavo in Ghent.

Unveiled in 1432, it had been piously commissioned by a leading local citizen, but also reflected the taste of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, who employed Jan van Eyck as court artist-cum-ambassador/spy. We have tantalisingly few details about this enigmatic chapter, and famous though it became, the altarpiece too holds its secrets. But the picture’s fame has also been its curse as, quite aside from the usual complications of poor restorations and confusing copies, it has been threatened by Reformation iconoclasm, split up and hidden, claimed several times as a prize of war, smuggled to various secret safe havens, partially sold



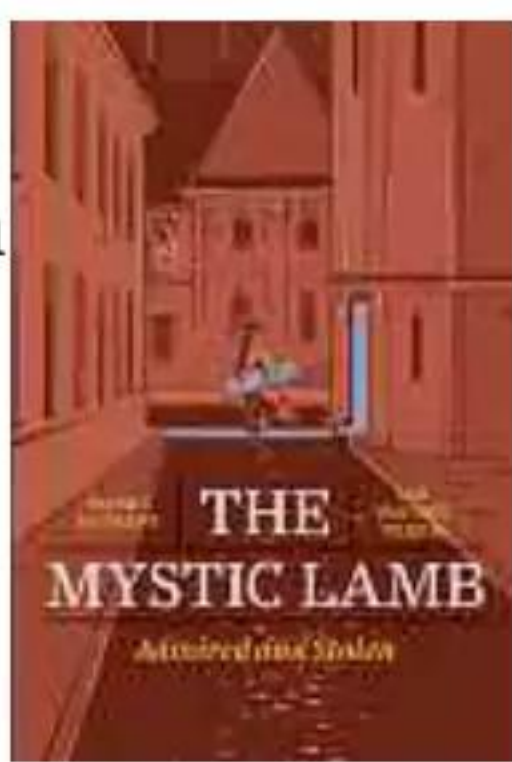


onto the art market and looted by the Nazis under Hitler's direct orders. As a prime example of approved northern painting, it would have been a centrepiece in the great Führermuseum he planned for Linz. Hitler's enthusiasm is understandable – the central panel shows the Holy Lamb standing on an altar as its blood flows into a chalice, evoking the Holy Blood and Grail imagery of his personal mythology.

Though its peregrinations ended after it was recovered from wartime storage in a salt mine and restored to Ghent, the altarpiece still poses an unanswered riddle. One of its panels, the “Just Judges”, is a replacement, the original having been stolen by a local stockbroker (and fantasist) Arsene Goedertier in 1934 and never recovered. With alarming ease Goedertier carried off two panels before sending an anonymous ransom note demanding a million francs for their return. Following negotiations that evoke a vintage crime novel, one panel was returned, but only a smaller ransom handed over. When Goedertier died later that year his responsibility for the theft came to light, but not the whereabouts of the still-unrecovered “Just Judges”, despite enigmatic clues and enthusiastic theories.

There are some nice fortean possibilities here – a mysterious colour photo in the Louvre, the confusion between copy and original – but they are not followed up or illustrated. This is neither a book of fortean investigation nor of art history – it offers only one unimpressive colour photograph of each of the altarpiece's four faces and no analysis of content or meaning. The story is a blandly-told episodic account that can jump over centuries and slip annoyingly into the present tense while putting anecdotal words into the mouths of historical individuals. Despite the contributions of illustrator Jan van der Weken, it is far from being a graphic novel, with simplified depictions of scenes that, delightful as they are in themselves, add nothing to our reading of the narrative.

A lovely volume with an interesting tale to tell, still I can't



imagine whose expectations this book will satisfy.

Gail-Nina Anderson

★ ★ ★

## Death and Changing Rituals

**Function and meaning in ancient funerary practices**

Ed. J Rasmus Brandt, Marina Prusac & Håkon Roland

Oxbow Books 2020

Pb, 480pp, £35, ISBN 9781789253818

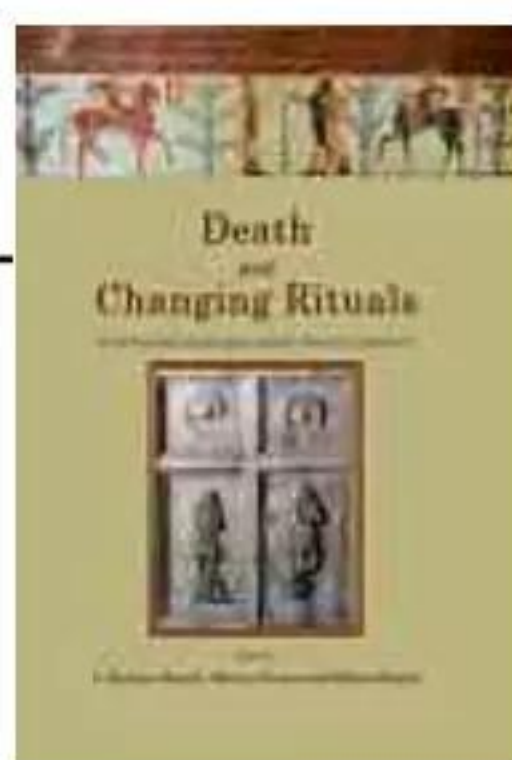
*Death and Changing Rituals* contains 14 papers covering different aspects of funerary practice and belief from the Mesolithic to the early modern period. They address the question of changing funerary rites: why and how do communities change the ways in which they treat dead bodies?

The examples in this volume address a number of different changes, including transitions in burial location, religious ritual, grave-goods and more. Each explores the ways in which these changes were influenced by social and political pressures, contact with other communities, developing beliefs about death and the body, and more. Although these connections can be enigmatic, the papers demonstrate insightful ways of thinking about the processes underlying change in funerary practice.

Two papers stand out as potentially interesting to fortean readers. J Rasmus Brandt's detailed, lavishly illustrated account of changing imagery in Etruscan tombs provides some compelling theories about the ways in which Etruscan images of the underworld and the space between it and the world of the living developed over time.

Sarah Tarlow's discussion of the ways in which beliefs about the dead body changed in post-mediaeval Britain and Ireland explores religious, social, and scientific beliefs about the importance of the body after death, then compares them to folk beliefs about the body, revealing a telling inconsistency.

All of the papers in this volume provide fascinating examples of the reasons for change in funerary practices over time, making it fascinating reading for anyone



interested in the archaeology of death and burial. Readers without some background in burial archaeology may not get as much out of most of the papers, although some, like Brandt and Tarlow's, could be rewarding for a broader audience.

James Holloway

★ ★ ★ ★

## My Favourite Dictators

**The Strange Lives of Tyrants**

Chris Mikul

Headpress 2020

Pb, 308pp, £17.99, ISBN 9781909394704

Writing “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts”, Thomas De Quincey suggested murder could be considered under two aspects. There was the moral aspect (“and that, I confess, is its weak side”) but there was also the æsthetic aspect – and that was the side he was going to concentrate on. There is a similar emphasis in this book by the admirable Chris Mikul, who has set himself the contentious task of taking a clutch of the world's most unpleasant and catastrophic dictators, and serving them up for their entertainment value.

For three decades Mikul has produced the zine *Bizzarrism*, and he has more recently compiled the *Eccentropedia*, an encyclopædia of eccentrics. His take on dictators is related to this, although as he points out they are in a sense the opposite of eccentrics, who tend to be benevolent, while dictators destroy eccentricity in others, removing any space where it could flourish. Eccentric or not, the 11 dictators in here are ridiculously aberrant: Hitler and Stalin are not included because Mikul considers them too dull.

Usually from underprivileged backgrounds, dictators tend to have stereotypically grandiose ideas about interior design (see Peter York's marvellous *Dictator's Homes*). They also have dodgy taste in art – Saddam Hussein was a big fan of American fantasy artist Rowena Morrill – and serious art is one of the first things to die in a dictatorship. But the art form they do often have a feeling for, to a sinister degree, is cinema, with its illusion and its total orchestration of reality.

Like the Ceausescus, Chairman and Madam Mao devoured glam-

orous movies of the kind totally forbidden to their people, while Imelda Marcos built a \$100 million dollar film festival building, and Enver Hoxha's Albania had a bizarre state-sponsored cult of Norman Wisdom. Kim Jong-Il (a big fan of James Bond, and anything with Elizabeth Taylor) took things a stage further by kidnapping a foreign director and actress to make films, and in reality, if you can call it that, North Korea's showcase capital Pyongyang has an all-encompassing fakery that would do credit to the *Truman Show*.

Field Marshal Doctor Idi Amin Dada, VC, DSO, MC and Conqueror of the British Empire, presented a less sophisticated spectacle and he is predictably good value, although it is worth remembering he murdered 300,000 to 500,000 Ugandans, many of them forced to kill each other with hammers or eat their own cooked flesh until they died from bleeding and septicæmia (it is hardly less shocking that he enjoyed a long and pleasant retirement in Saudi Arabia, where King Fahd gave him a pension of \$14,000 a month).

Jean-Claude “Papa Doc” Duvalier is urbane in comparison, with his Tonton Macoute secret police (the name means Uncle Knapsack, a children's bogeyman), but there are still picturesque touches, like the rotting corpse of a rebel leader seated in an armchair by the airport, under a Coca-Cola sign reading “Welcome to Haiti”.

It's hard to find entertainment in the sheer magnitude of human suffering and cultural destruction in Mao's China, whose results the world still lives with today, and it is a bold move to market this book under Humour. Popular history at its most readable, yes, but Humour is stretching things, albeit intentionally: “the most potent weapon we have against dictators is laughter”, says Mikul.

Less exploitative than it looks, this historically sound book has a winning sanity and intelligence. It is a powerful reminder of mankind's endlessly toxic irrationality, and we should remember millions upon millions have not had the luxury of laughing.

Phil Baker

★ ★ ★ ★





# Overturning assumptions

Sometimes inexplicable events in their lives can cause even rationalist sceptics to question their previous perceptions

## The Flip

Who You Really Are And Why It Matters

Jeffrey J Kripal

Penguin 2020

Pb, 239pp, £8.99, ISBN 9780141992563

The significance of anomalous experience is increasingly a matter for serious study in the humanities, and the author of this book has been one of the most prolific contributors. A professor of philosophy and religious thought at Rice University, Houston, Jeffrey Kripal has devoted much of his career to the fair-minded study of the esoteric aspects of modern American culture, from the writings of Charles Fort to the spiritual implications of comic-book superheroes.

In *The Flip*, Kripal returns again to the worlds of the strange, but less to research than to justify the validity of the field. The book is thus pitched at those who might be seen as the silently curious, especially in the academy, who hide their private interests in such topics behind a carapace of scepticism. Kripal's ambition is to provide these secretly open-minded thinkers with an intellectually respectable escape route from pure materialism.

The core of his argument revolves around what he calls "the Flip" – those frequently undiscussed but apparently ubiquitous moments when the "minded cosmos" breaks through into subjective human experience. Suddenly, inexplicable events attended by "baroque or fantastic imagery" make the percipient question their previous everyday assumptions. To drive home the importance and respectability of these moments, Kripal does not use examples from the man and woman on the street, but focuses instead on professional philosophers, scientists and writers, several of whom are the epitome of "scepticism". They include the analytic philosopher AJ Ayer, a vocal

proponent of atheism, who underwent a Near-Death Experience (NDE) in old age that led him to review, if not revise his beliefs; the science writer and noted "skeptical" Michael Shermer, who has written of how a dead radio started playing a meaningful old song just before his wedding, which, Shermer admits "shook ... [his] skepticism to the core"; and the trained biologist and social commentator Barbara Ehrenreich, whose youthful mystical experience on an American street, which she has described as like being "savaged by a flock of invisible angels", has proved a life-long challenge to her metaphysical assumptions.

Kripal's point is that if it happened to these people – of all people – then you have to take such things seriously.

He provides further intellectual underpinnings to this core argument by showing the rising support for metaphysical alternatives to pure materialism in professional philosophical

circles, providing a survey of panpsychism, idealism and other modes of thought that open the door to the

anomalous. And there is a pragmatic angle, too.

Unsurprisingly, Kripal sees the spiritual and cultural value of such experiences as "building blocks of meaning", a phrase he takes from fellow scholar of religion, Ann Taves.

"The Flip" can also take thinkers along different pathways of thought about their field; amongst others, Kripal cites the neurosurgeon Eben Alexander, whose prolonged mystical experiences while in a coma have helped revise his previously materialist views on neuroscience.

Kripal sees this kind of inclusive intellectual approach that "the Flip" can trigger as an antidote to materialist complaints that anomalous phenomena cannot be studied because they do not "play by the rules" – and therefore by implication are not real! Noting that "our conclusions are really a function of our exclusions," he suggests that the tools of modern science alone might not be enough to understand the anomalous, calling on the thinking of theoretical physicist Freeman Dyson for support. Dyson himself was a believer in ESP, which he concluded was dependent on emotional states that could not be reproduced easily in a laboratory. For Kripal, following Dyson, this means that anecdotal evidence has to be treated as rigorously as experimental data. Kripal argues accordingly that it is not acceptable for rationalists to ridicule anomalous events in public because they are not generated by conventional scientific method, while also often privately judging them to be "the real deal". For Kripal, honest thinkers must therefore set their intellectual tolerances wider, use multiple perspectives and, above all, show intellectual courage.

Even so, however, Kripal seems to have his own unstated boundaries too. Somewhat intriguingly for an avowed fan of Fort, Kripal largely steers away from using more "exterior" examples of anomalous experience such as UFO encounters, UFO and other abductions, hauntings etc, as potential triggers for "the Flip". Based on the thrust of this volume, which is so elegantly and convincingly argued, it seems like a strange and anomalous omission in its own right. Inadvertent or otherwise, it does indicate that even if we can accept that intellectual curiosity should trump respectability, it is not always an easy outcome to achieve.

Matthew Redhead

★★★★

## Infinity in the Palm of Your Hand

Fifty Wonders That Reveal an Extraordinary Universe

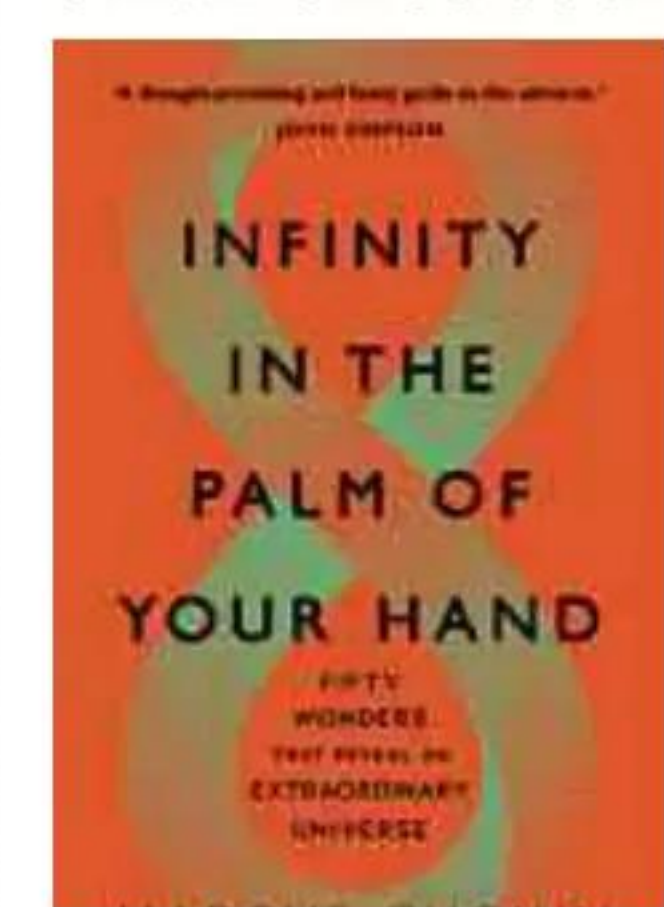
Marcus Chown

Michael O'Mara Books 2020

Pb, 256pp, £8.99, ISBN 9781789292060

This is one of those books that take a small look at a large range of subjects, all of which will make you wonder and some of which will really make the inside of your skull itch.

The author knows his stuff, both as a scientist and a writer. Chown is a former radio astronomer for Caltech and is now the



cosmology consultant for *New Scientist*. He's a winner of the *Sunday Times* Science Book of the Year award and twice runner up of the Royal Society Book Prize.

*Infinity in the Palm of Your Hand* is divided up into seven sections ranging from Biological Things through to Cosmic Things. Each section then has several short chapters, the largest of which is eight whole pages. If there's a subject you don't like, it's over quickly and there's another one along straight away to take the taste away. You'll end up quoting facts from it. For example, if you took the space out of all the atoms making up all the people currently alive, the matter you had left would be the size of one (very dense) sugar cube. Or, numerically, 50 per cent of the cells in your body are bacterial.

With the 18 pages of notes you can easily find out more about any of the covered topics that takes your fancy. There were some topics I was already familiar with, some I had a basic understanding of and some I'm quite happy to think "that's the latest thinking is it? Okay." And I'm sure that will be the same for most people, though the topic categories will vary. All told, it's a worthy book that will make you discuss things with those around you and will make you think, which is always a good thing.

And by the way, did you know that for 1.4 million years there was no change in the design of hand axes?

Gordon Rutter

★★★★





## COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

DAVID SUTTON OPENS A TOMBSTONE-SIZED HISTORY OF THE COMPANY THAT REVOLUTIONISED COMICS



### The History of EC Comics

Grant Geissman

Taschen, 2020

Hb, 592pp, £150, ISBN 978-3836549769

Anyone who has enjoyed Taschen's previous comic book histories – lavish volumes on Marvel and DC – will be keen to get their hands on the publisher's latest comic-centric offering, another blockbusting behemoth of a book that's approximately the size and weight of a child's tombstone... perhaps that of a juvenile delinquent who came to a sticky end as a result of reading horror comics. Over 592 enormous and copiously illustrated pages – the book contains over 1,000 images – EC expert Grant Geissman tells the story of the underdog comic publishing company that in the 1950s turned the world of 'funny books' upside down, in the process becoming a byword for bad taste, a focus for moral panics and a scapegoat for America's postwar social problems.

When Bill Gaines inherited his father's comic business

in 1947 – comics pioneer MC Gaines had died in a freak boating accident – he certainly didn't expect to change the face of comics forever; he had little interest in either the medium or the business, having been comprehensively put off by the old man's domineering – some would say downright abusive – treatment.

But, as if in a twist from an EC horror story, Bill took his father's company, known for publishing comics based on biblical stories and uplifting episodes from American history – EC stood originally for 'Educational Comics' – and transformed it into something darker and far more successful.

Gaines might have been a reluctant recruit to comics – he only took over the business at his mother's insistence – but once he'd discovered an unsuspected enthusiasm for publishing and put together a team of top-notch artists and writers, he proved to be both an innovator and a champion of an artform that was still anything but respectable. Quickly realising that the cycle of comic 'trends' tended to move quickly, he ditched EC's (now 'Entertaining Comics') increasingly moribund line of imitative Western, crime and romance titles and replaced them with what he called the "New Trend" – horror comics. Part of the credit for this must go to Gaines's collaborator Al Feldstein, who suggested trying out a macabre tale in the pages of a 1949 issue of *Crime Patrol*; realising they were onto something, EC launched *Tales from the Crypt*, quickly followed by *The Vault of*



*Horror and The Haunt of Fear*. Each title had its own comedy horror host – the Crypt-Keeper, The Vault-Keeper, the Old Witch – framing devices that injected black humour into increasingly grim and gory tales of horrid (and always hideously appropriate) comeuppance and vengeance from beyond the grave. As EC's 'New Trend' grew it encompassed other genres: hardboiled crime in *Crime Suspense Stories*, science fiction in *Weird Science* and *Weird Fantasy*, unforgiving depictions of war in *Two-Fisted Tales* and seminal satirical comedy in *MAD*.

This growing range of titles was matched by a stable of creators constituting a who's who of 1950s comic talent: as well as Feldstein, there was Johnny Craig, Jack Davis, Wally Wood, Joe Orlando, Harvey Kurtzman, Al Williamson, Graham Ingels, Bernie Krigstein and John Severin. It was an astonishing roster, and rather than imposing any sort of house style, Gaines gave his artists unprecedented freedom (as well

as credits) to explore and invent. The results were revolutionary, but soon fell foul of Dr Wertham's moral crusade and the 1954 Senate Subcommittee hearings that, in effect, saw EC's output shut down and Gaines's experiment brought to a premature conclusion (see **FT320:28-35**).

As influential as the EC horror comics have proven – they are what the company is known for in popular memory – it's arguable that the publisher's legacy was both broader and deeper; the standards of art and writing set by Gaines and co helped give rise to higher standards in comics generally, while EC's treatment of taboo social themes, from racism and bigotry to corruption and addiction, found a later echo in Stan Lee's shaping of Marvel as a progressive force in comics.

There are some real treasures collected in this comprehensive historical overview: unpublished artwork, rare photos and a gallery of every single EC cover. Highly recommended.





## Wild horses

This 1977 film adaptation of Peter Shaffer's play – inspired by a real-life case of horse ripping – explores a rich mix of fortean topics, including religion, mythology, psychiatry and madness.



### Equus

Dir Sidney Lumet, UK 1977  
BFI, £22.99 (Blu-ray)

*Equus* truly is a strange beast. Dr Martin Dysart (Richard Burton) is a psychiatrist working with disturbed children. Teenager Alan Strang (Peter Firth) has blinded six horses with a sickle; slowly Dysart pieces together Alan's story. He replaced the Christian god of his fundamentalist mother with a created horse deity, *Equus*. He found a weekend job at a stables, identifying with the horses, holding a leg bent, pawing the ground. He began riding the horses at night, bareback and naked, calling out a chant culminating in "I want to be inside you, and be you, forever one person," as he climaxed. When a teenage girl working at the stables, Jill Mason (Jenny Agutter) seduces him, they lie naked together above the stable, but the sound of the horses below them makes him unable to have sex; he sends Jill away then blinds the horses so they can no longer watch him.

As Dysart draws the story out of him, fragment by fragment, he becomes more and more disillusioned with his own life and his work: his job is to cure Alan, to

*"It's very difficult to actually put your finger on what it's about"*

make him normal, but this means taking away what makes him special – his belief, his worship, his fulfilment.

The film has a slow start, as Dysart (in Burton's beautifully rounded tones) begins his narration, used as a framing device throughout, but it builds into a gripping, powerful drama exploring madness, the ambiguity of psychiatric treatment, religion, mythology, sexuality and confused personal identity – a good fortean mix! Perhaps the most astounding thing about the story is that something so bizarre becomes so utterly credible.

This new limited edition BFI release is the first time the film has been available on Blu-ray in the UK. An interview with Peter Firth shows how important *Equus* was to his career. A Bradford lad with some child roles on TV, he was suddenly on stage at Sir Laurence Olivier's National Theatre starring opposite Alec McCowen as Dysart (1973),

then on Broadway with Anthony Hopkins (1974), and then in 1977 in this film version with Richard Burton. From *Equus* he went on to the time-travel *Play for Today*, "The Flipside of Dominick Hide" (1980), and then (among much else) to *Spooks* (2002-2011).

There's a host of extras: a 90-minute 1981 interview with director Sidney Lumet, a two-hour portrait of Richard Burton, and a couple of dated but charming government films, one from 1940 on religion in Britain (strongly emphasising social aspects rather than the spiritual) and a delightful 1951 film, *The Farmer's Horse*. And back to the weird: a very odd BFI short film from 1969, *The Watchers*, about a teenage girl having supernatural and/or UFO experiences in the hills around Todmorden, Yorkshire. Quite apart from the eeriness and the haunting use of the moody landscape, this is significant for at least three reasons. It must be one of the first alien abduction films, years before *CE3*; it hints at links between UFO experiences and more mythical Otherworld experiences, anticipating writers like Jacques Vallée and Patrick Harpur; and there's the added frisson that a decade after the film, Todmorden had its own unexplained UFO event...

David V Barrett



### Black Test Car

Dir Keith Thomas, US 2019  
Arrow Video, £17.99 (Blu-ray)

Thanks to a growing number of enterprising distribution companies (Arrow in this instance), it's now possible to see all sorts of films from around the world that were once virtually impossible to track down. This is particularly true of films by less familiar Japanese directors like Shôhei Imamura, Seijun Suzuki

and in this case Yasuzô Masumura.

*Black Test Car* is essentially a morality tale masquerading as a film noir masquerading as a story about industrial spies in the automotive industry. The Tiger company is designing an affordable sports car – the Pioneer – and suspects rival firm Yamato of stealing the blueprints in a bid to launch their own, almost identical model. Tiger deploys industrial spy Onoda (Hideo Takamatsu) and his protégé Asahina (Jirô Tamiya) to find out how much Yamato knows.

This is a downbeat picture: almost everyone in it is morally compromised, corrupted, exploited or deceived. It's in this respect that *Black Test Car* resembles a film noir. The photography, too, is straight out of the 1940s and although their roles are translated somewhat, all the figures one would expect to see are here: a decent man out of his depth, a femme fatale, a corrupt detective, mob bosses and so on. However, in another respect, particularly the mise-en-scene, it's more like a Michelangelo Antonioni picture: characters are framed by architecture or cars or walls to make them look uncomfortable, squeezed, under pressure. The film is set almost entirely in an urban environment, which heightens this sense of dislocation and loss of individuality.

The transfer is excellent and the black and white photography pin-sharp. The subtitles are also perfectly coherent, which will no doubt come as a relief to fans of Japanese cinema who have had to put up with ropey translations for far too long. The disc also contains a second feature *The Black Report*, a sequel of sorts, and a fascinating monologue by film scholar Jonathan Rosenbaum, in which I learned more about Masumura in 17 minutes than I had in decades.

Daniel King







# A Trip to the Moon

Dir Georges Melies, France 1902  
Arrow Video, £45 (Blu-ray + book)

It can now be revealed that Stanley Kubrick did *not* fake the Moon landing footage – in fact, it was Georges Méliès who, back in 1902, presented to an astonished world *A Trip to the Moon* (‘Le Voyage dans la Lune’). The film depicts a cabal of scientists who decide to visit our nearest celestial object. Instead of a rocket, they construct a huge gun loaded with a capsule to carry six of the intrepid astronomers to the lunar surface.

The film, in a series of vignettes, presents us with the building of the gun and the ceremonial launch. On the Moon, the scientists encounter curious flora that transform one of their umbrellas into a giant mushroom. Even more amazing, they meet the acrobatic humanoid Selenites, whom they vigorously attack. The Selenites quickly overwhelm the explorers, who are forced to run back to their ship. As they fall back to Earth, a Selenite clings to their craft and is exhibited by the excited welcoming party. Roswell eat your heart out!

Of course, it’s not real – but Méliès was an early master of film trickery and effects, largely adapted from his experience as a stage magician. Using his own specially built film studio he, like Kubrick, controlled every aspect of his productions, from scriptwriting to designing and painting the sets and creating innovative effects (superimpositions, double exposures, slow motion); he even starred in his films. This short film gives us an insight into his fantastical and surreal imagination (inspired by the writings of Verne and HG Wells). Extras include a documentary by Georges Franju on Méliès’ career. Another documentary by Serge Bromberg and Eric Lange highlights the importance of this film and how it was restored. A concluding video essay by Jon Spira explores the many innovations Méliès brought to his productions.

This Blu-ray is in a limited edition of 1,000, and includes a 214-page hardback edition of Méliès’s autobiography, translated into English for the first time.  
Nigel Watson



## THE REVEREND’S REVIEW

FT’s resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! ([www.peterlaws.co.uk](http://www.peterlaws.co.uk))

### Dawn of the Dead

Dir George A Romero, US/Italy 1978  
Second Sight Films, £74.99 (4K)/£64.99 (Blu-ray)

### The Haunting of Bly Manor

Created by Mike Flanagan, US 2020  
Streaming on Netflix

### Vampires vs the Bronx

Dir Oz Rodriguez, US 2020  
Streaming on Netflix

### Witches of Amityville

Dir Rebecca Matthews, UK 2020  
High Fliers, £9.99 (DVD)

It’s witches, ghosts and vampires this month, but leading the classic monster pack are the blue-faced zombies of George Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*. This oft-released ‘Ben Hur of horror movies’ comes in a bulging seven-disc set with multiple film versions, soundtrack albums, books, posters, extras galore plus a free wallet-hole (it costs £64.99). The film itself remains a raw masterpiece that manages to be a million things at once: a wise epic, a hardcore exploitation movie, a cultural satire, a disgusting gore-fest, an eerie apocalyptic vision, and a kick-ass and funny action movie. Watching it after many years, I still can’t figure out how Romero pulled this off. He wrote the script in an apartment in Rome (at the invitation of the film’s producer, Dario Argento), but when his wife Christine Forrest read his vision she was worried. His ambition simply outstripped his budget. She was right of course; until she was proved wrong – much to her delight. And that’s what *Dawn of the Dead* delivers:



*The film remains a masterpiece that manages to be a million things at once*

delight. Not just to its audience (I punched the air when this set hit my doormat) but to the people who worked on it too. You can see it in their faces in these excellent new extras. Forty years on, and they still look giddy when talking about the miracle of *Dawn of the Dead*. Who can blame them, when the film that spawned an entire zombie industry is still the best zombie movie ever made? Which looks beautiful, by the way, and comes in two different flavours: Blu-ray and 4K.

Ghosts now, with Netflix’s *The Haunting of Bly Manor*. Internet reaction has been, um... mixed. “Perfectly splendid,” say some, others, “Perfectly booooooring.” It’s true that this show drags at times and it lacks

the relentless shocks of last year’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (from the same cast and crew). It also injects copious doses of soap opera into Henry James’s *Turn of the Screw* source material, as well as what some have described as an ‘overdose’ of Englishness – Henry Thomas’s clipped accent is a brandy-swilling delight. Yet just as I was thinking *Bly Manor* might be a misfire, I watched the last two episodes, and it got to me in the end. Some of my horror-loving friends were tutting at the melodrama of it all. Me? I was wiping my eyes at what ended up being a sweet and touching, if overlong, ghost story.

*Vampires vs The Bronx*, also on Netflix, works as a clever metaphor for white privilege (a friendly multi-ethnic neighbourhood gets invaded by a corporation of white vampires who treat them like cattle). Yet despite these refreshing satirical elements, the film feels oddly old-fashioned. I rather expected the vampires to feel more ‘relevant’ – fanged hipsters or celebrity poverty-tourists –but these appear to have stepped straight from a 1980s *Lost Boys* set. But then, maybe that’s the precise point the film is trying to make: that racism isn’t just shocking and dangerous, but simply out of place, and belongs in ‘the olden days’.

We’ve had zombies, ghosts and vampires, so how about *Witches... of Amityville* no less? This has nowt to do with George and Kathy Lutz, or even the house itself (I tend to expect that with ‘Amityville’ movies these days). Here, a girl called Jessica is accepted into Amityville Academy, a school for witches. But when her friend has her throat slit on the first night (the film’s only real moment of gore), she realises this isn’t really Hogwarts. Nutshell thoughts? It’s like *The Craft* with sub-par acting and ploddy bits, but if you like good witches shooting badly animated firebolts at bad witches, go for your life.



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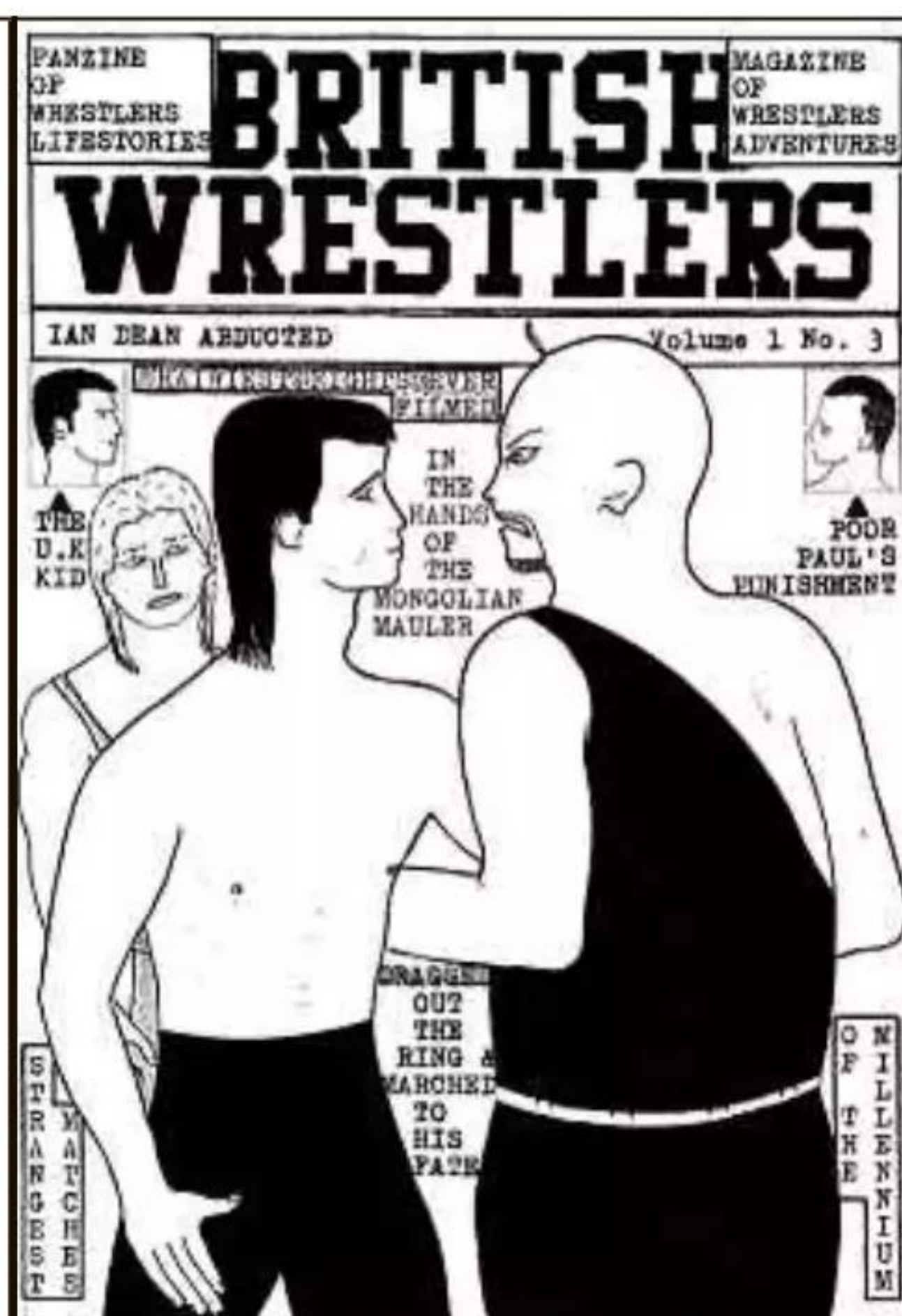
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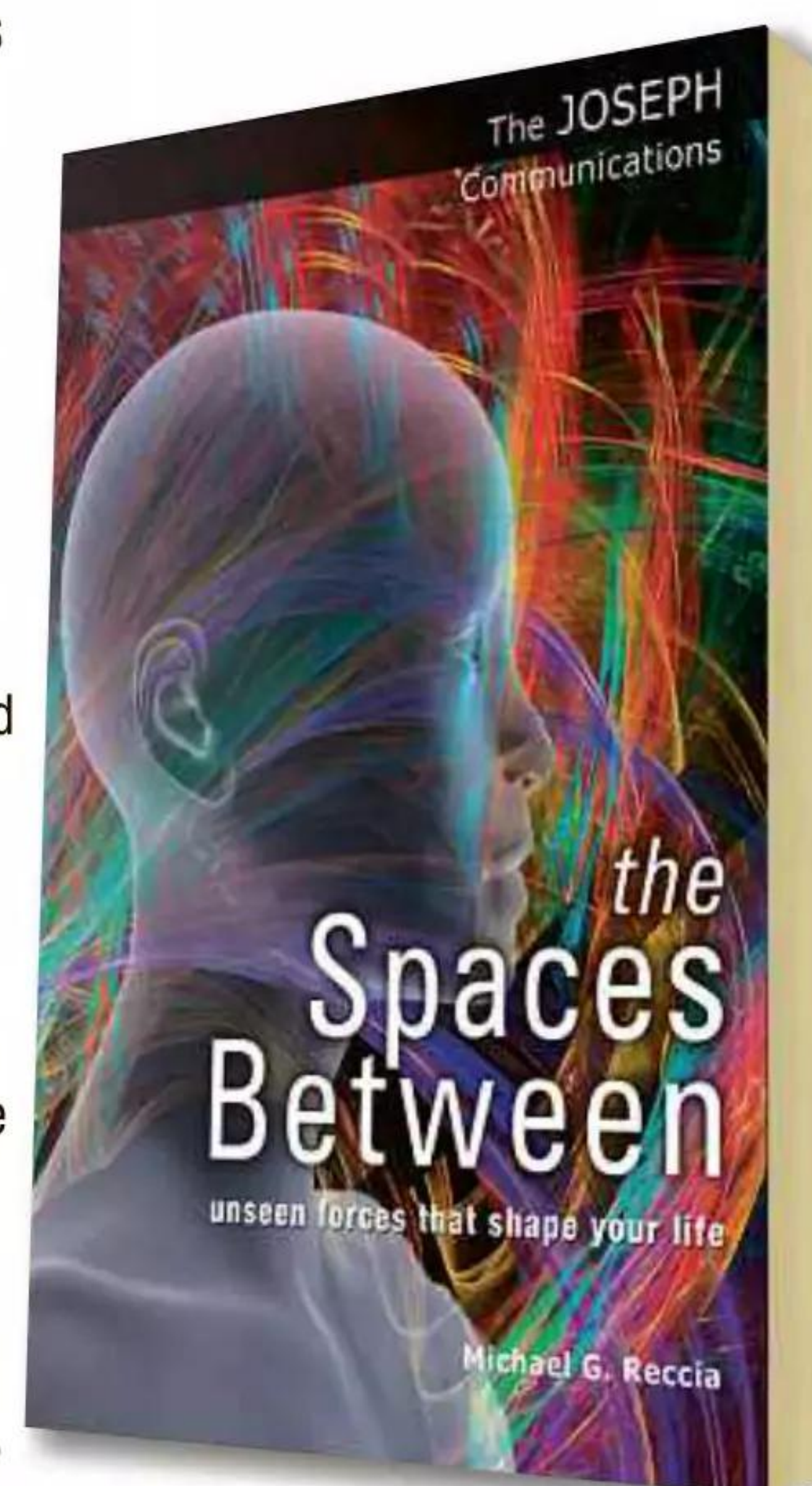
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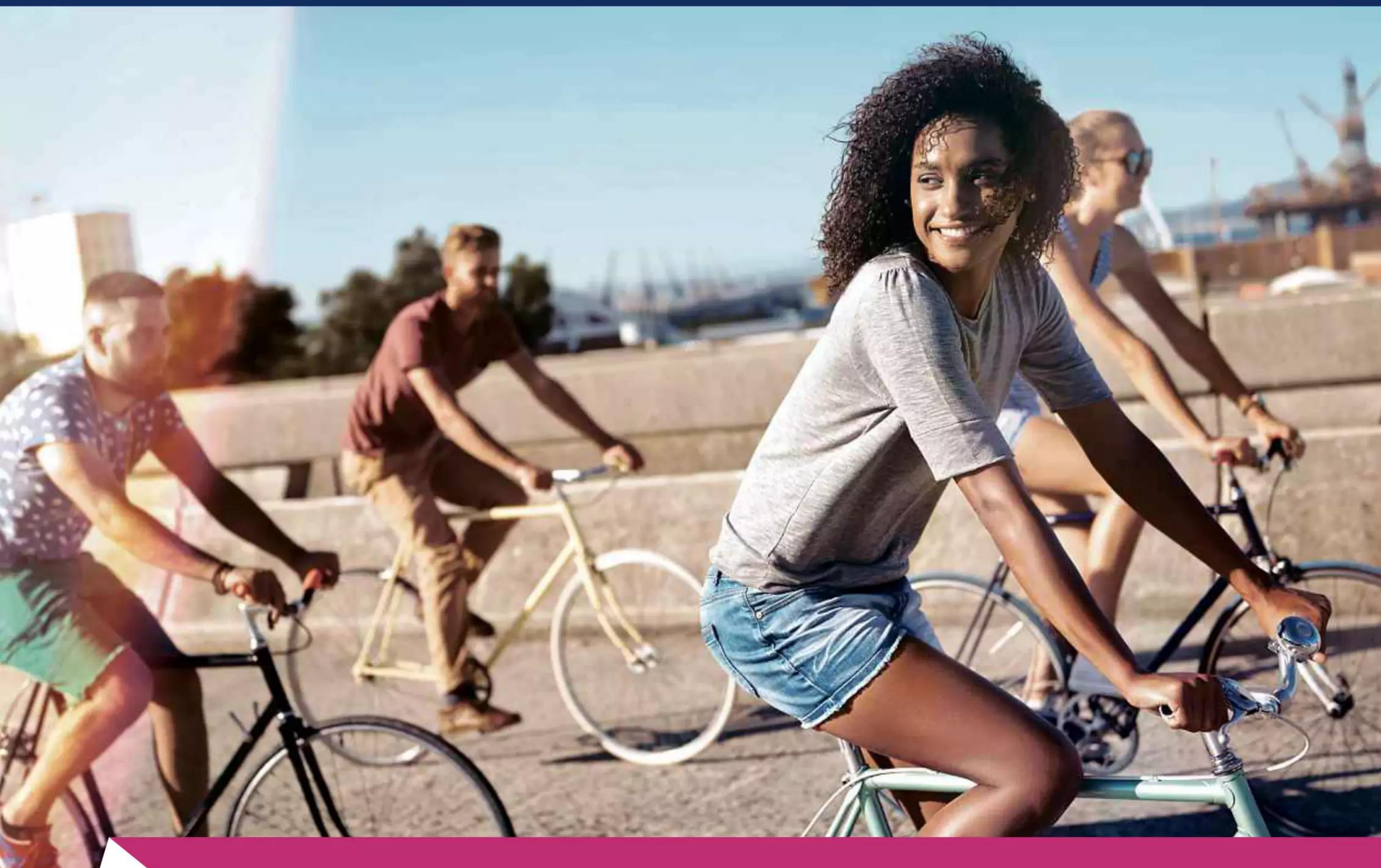


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# LETTERS

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## Pepys spoof

Sadly, the wonderfully prescient quotation from Samuel Pepys [FT397:70], “A dram in exchange for the pox is an ill bargain indeed,” is not by the great diarist, but from a spoof Twitter account. (<https://londonist.com/london/books-and-poetry/samuel-pepys-quote>; <https://www.pepysdiary.com/news/2020/03/25/14052/>; <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/taverns-gadabouts-samuel-pepys/>)

Pepys also didn’t write: “On hearing ill rumour that Londoners may soon be urged into their lodgings by Her Majesty’s men, I looked upon the street to see a gaggle of striplings making fair merry, and no doubt spreading the plague well about. Not a care had these rogues for the health of their elders!”

Damn those young rogues!

Twitter-Pepys has set the record straight: “I hath been told by several fellows that my musings upon the pox in the year of our Lord 2020 are being mistook by some for my diaries of yore. I mean not to make a fool of any man, but hasten to mind my good friends that my quill here doth write of modern-day matters.”

[https://twitter.com/Pepys\\_Diaries/status/1242092198180655109](https://twitter.com/Pepys_Diaries/status/1242092198180655109)

**David V Barrett**

London

## Among us?

I wonder if the British tabloids haven’t misquoted or exaggerated Helen Sharman’s views on aliens [FT395:19]. Here’s an excerpt from her website: “People often ask Helen if she believes in aliens. In answer... There are billions of stars and numerous exoplanets so Helen thinks it is likely there are other lifeforms elsewhere in the Universe (but she does not believe that intelligent humanoid alien life is with us on Earth). The Earth, along with some spacecraft that humans have sent into space, supports all life we know, though Helen agrees with the view of many scientists that it is possible for meteorites to have brought to Earth molecules that were, or could be, precursors to life and perhaps even something we might

## SIMULACRA CORNER



On a walk during lockdown, Chanté Williamson and her children, Amélie and Bertie, spotted a ‘fist tree’ in their local cemetery in Walsall.

*We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 66598, London N11 9EN or to [sieveking@forteantimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com).*

consider to be life itself.”

Personally, I love the idea of unnoticed aliens among us. It reminds me of the introduction to *The Jon Pertwee Book of Monsters*, which scored itself into my childhood with the suggestion that anything might be a mysterious creature, evoking the image of passing between close-set hedges through grasping branches rustling, surely, in a breeze?

Wonderful to imagine what else in our daily life might be less ordinary, or less understood, than we imagine. And if we are unaware of them, are they, so far, unaware of us? Until some day we do something that makes them

notice we’re more than objects. Who knows if that would be a good thing?

**Dean Teasdale**

Gateshead, Tyne & Wear

## Blaming the Universe

I have to agree with Mark Graham’s assessment of the Mandela Effect [FT396:72]; it’s most likely an example of our inability to admit our mistakes. It is no coincidence that this phenomenon rose to prominence in the last decade or so, when more and more people have access to

a powerful portable device that gives you access to thousands of years’ worth of human knowledge in seconds. The comedian John Finnemore once wrote a very funny sketch about how no mundane argument down the pub about the name of an actor or the winner of the 1954 cup final can end in amicable disagreement any more. Someone can look it up and someone will lose face. Is it surprising, then, that some people are more willing to believe that the Universe is at fault, rather than their own brains?

**Lewis JW Hurst**

Tokyo, Japan

## Irish Wildman

I noticed this unusual story from the *London Journal* of 16-23 July 1720. The location of the exhibition is not precisely stated, but I presume it was London. “We have a very odd Creature here, like a Man in Shape, but covered like a Bear; they tell us he came from Ireland, where he lived till he was Twenty Years old, and run wild in the Woods: All the Parts of his Body are overgrown with long black Hair, which they having stiffened and rubbed backwards makes him look very deliciously [sic] it seems, and the Women go in Shoals to see him. They shew him for Two-pence a Piece, and an innumerable many Customers they have had, but as they expose him no lower than his Waste, their Trade begins to fail them, and the Females Curiosity to abate.”

**Richard Muirhead**

By email

## Amityville

I am probably not the only reader to have noticed the coincidence in FT397. On pp.56-7 you have an article on “the Amityville horror,” which of course started with the murder of a family by one of the children. On page 11 there is a report of a son murdering his father in Amityville during a Zoom videochat. Is there something to be asked about Amityville family values?

**Martin Jenkins**

London



# LETTERS

## Not worshipped

Ulrich Magin, [FT396:72] states that “both Protestant and Catholic Sinti and Romany people worship the Virgin Mary”. Catholics revere the BVM but they certainly don’t worship her – a bit of misinformation dating back to at least Luther’s time.

**Ray Stephenson**

*Gateshead, Tyne & Wear*

## Avoid the paranoid

Thanks – as ever – for your indispensable monthly package of world-expanding information!

Re. Jeffrey Vallance’s piece on instructions to ‘avoid The Noid’ [FT396:42-45], this defunct promotional campaign was new to me, but I’d heard the phrase somewhere before: the legendary rapper Chuck D (of Public Enemy) is a man who chooses his words very carefully, always with one eye on the zeitgeist – and his lyric for the track ‘Welcome to the Terrordome’ (a long and meandering reflection on race and culture, released exactly a year after Kenneth Lamar Noid’s hostage-taking incident) contains the line “as for now, I know to avoid the paranoid”.

**Lex Lamb**

*Glasgow*

## Down south

To add some information to the letter about “down south” [FT390:67]. This confusion of direction was common in the UK railway community up to at least the 1960s. Railway travellers always went *up* to London from whichever direction they started; going from London was always *down*. London is very close to sea level so its height is not the reason. I suspect the reason is that London is the main railway terminus, and it was the idea in those days that you go up to the centre and down to the country: in a similar way the UK mail service re-numbered all houses so that in each street number one was the house nearest the mail distribution centre. This was done over 100 years ago and reflects a different mindset that seems strange now, but the



## Aussie Banknotes

“The Conspirasphere” [FT394:5] referred to images of the “Corona Virus” that seem to appear on some Australian bank notes. These are not only on the 10 dollar note, but also on the five and 20 dollar notes. To most, these so called “corona virus” images are just stylised representations of Australia’s national flower, the Wattle Flower – small, yellow, and resembling a powder puff.

**Max Garrod** Grafton, New South Wales

concept still lingers on in some families or communities.

**John Blackmore-Tucker**

*By email*

## Hat confusion

In Jenny Randles’s UFO Files (FT398:30-31), the photo of the Pan Am ‘bump hat’ illustrating the piece was wrongly captioned. I’m certain Keir Dullea never wore this headgear in the movie (unless he was moonlighting as a Pan Am stewardess). It would have been either Edwina Carroll, Penny Brahms or Heather Downham who sported this speculative space age headgear, designed, by the way, by Hardy Amies.

**Anton Binder**

*Brighton, East Sussex*

## Silver people

Iconic UK folk musician and music historian Shirley Collins recently published her autobiography, *All In The Downs* (Strange Attractor Press, 2018), in which she recounts a fascinating close encounter experience recorded by her mother, Dorothy, at a farmhouse near Coghurst, Sussex, on 23 June 1957. Collins presents her mother’s account in full (pp.195-197 – this is rather lengthy so I will provide a summary.

At home alone for a few days, Dorothy is awoken at 11pm one evening by green and white flashes playing on the ceiling (precise times are given in the account – Dorothy states that

she had a clock near the bed which she noted throughout the encounter). Thinking that a caravan in a neighbouring field may have caught fire, she looks out the window to see green and white rays ‘coming down’ in a stand of trees. Becoming apprehensive due to her isolation, she attempts to calm herself down and opens the window again at 12:15am, this time seeing the outline of a spaceship amidst the trees. Although the night is very dark, Dorothy has the impression that the spaceship is made of a very light material or metal, “pale-khaki in colour”. After ascertaining that she is neither dreaming nor suffering from some fit of madness, her fear begins to be tempered by an interest in the phenomenon. She then hears “a beautiful, deep, melodious sort of humming” as if “from a huge army of bees”, and witnesses glowing light emanating from the spaceship in waves like ripples made “when a stone is thrown into a pond”. Along with this apian humming, reported in many other UFO experiences, she also notes that she “felt cut off from the rest of the world”, which suggests a state of consciousness redolent of ‘the Oz factor’.

Becoming fearful again, Dorothy shuts the window and returns to bed. At about 2:17am, with the white and green lights still flickering across the ceiling, she lies resisting the urge to venture outside, as if the humming and the glow were attempting to attract her towards the spaceship. At 3:01am she hears a sound “like some soft material nibbling the window”, and looks up to see a “little silver being beckoning me through the glass”. She describes the being’s silver skin or clothes as “beautifully soft”, “non-porous” and as “flexible as my own skin”. She also notes the being’s “curious[ly] shaped hands”, justifying the lack of further description with the intriguing statement: “I’m afraid to draw them as I feel I shall be committed to their influence or make them earth-bound.” In another piece of common UFO-related imagery, Dorothy then sees an owl flying across





the orchard, which she finds comforting and leads to thoughts that the spaceship and occupants have benign intentions and mean her no harm. However, she then begins to feel resentful about being controlled or influenced by the spaceship and beings, and remains in bed, continuing to fight the urge to climb out the window (it is unclear whether the being is still at the window or has retreated). This struggle continues until dawn, at which time the sounds and lights disappear and her fear fades, leaving her to sleep soundly for a few hours.

Dorothy's account concludes with a paragraph recounting the 'after effects' of her experience. These included warning other members of her family not to get too close to her as she felt she was potentially 'dangerous' to them in some way, and the curious knowledge that the silver being could not pass through the window because the "sand in glass was not passable by silver people". She also perceived that the small silver beings were in control of larger beings, "not seen but felt, and benign". Dorothy's account concludes with the suggestion of a psychic dimension to the encounter – "my daughter [Dolly, Shirley Collins's sister] had a strange dream on the same night – dreamt that space ships had landed by the cottage and that I was terribly frightened". So potent was this dream that Dolly cut short her trip to London and returned to the farmhouse the next morning to alleviate the anxiety that it generated. That the experience was not purely subjective is indicated by a letter written to the local newspaper by a farmer "looking for an explanation of the green and white flashes he had seen that same night".

Alongside this UFO story, Collins relates several ghostly and psychic experiences, the most intriguing of which involved two walks through a deep valley called Balsdean near Brighton. On both occasions Collins felt that she was being watched, and out of the 'corners of her eyes' felt that she could perceive surly "Roman soldiers in ranks lining the ridge of the hillside" above,

with the impression of Celts or Stone Age peoples observing from beyond the Romans. Such was the sinister ambience induced by these walks that Collins states she has vowed not to return to the valley.

**Dean Ballinger**  
*Hamilton, New Zealand*

## The Silver Man

I was surprised to read that the Risley "Silver Man" mystery [FT397:36-41] is now seen as a forgotten incident – I vividly remember reading about it in UFO-related publications in the 1980s. In particular, that legendary partwork *The Unexplained* illustrated the case with a colourful but fanciful painting of the entity, laser-beam eyes and all, that's been burned into my memory ever since. Glen Vaudrey's explanation of the case is certainly convincing, and I love the idea of a "space monster" report being the result of nothing more than an attempt to put the willies up some students. Nonetheless, it stands or falls on the uncorroborated testimony of a single anonymous informant, essentially making it "my word against theirs" in relation to the original sighting report. So the jury is still out for me on this one. That said, I can't help comparing it to the giant silver-suited humanoid who terrorised Ripperston Farm in the "Welsh Triangle" UFO flap of 1977, which was apparently rumoured to be the work of a local prankster. Could the media coverage of this story have influenced "Big John's" alleged decision to impersonate an alien a few months later?

Glen's suggestion that many classic UFO reports would evaporate under reinvestigation also rings true. After recently re-reading some UFO books of the 1960s and 1970s I've been impressed (not entirely in a positive way) by the way these works often uncritically accept close encounter and occupant reports that, to a modern reader, seem like ridiculous tall tales or obvious hoaxes. It seems as if UFO investigators in the early decades of the phenomenon were affected by the same perceptual blindness

that led paranormalists of the early 20th century to accept ludicrous "spirit photographs" and the Cottingley Fairies as genuine evidence of the supernatural. Maybe when a mystery is fresh and new, we just don't yet have the cognitive tools to filter out the nonsense from the truly baffling. At its core, the UFO enigma remains very real, and if we could take time out to strip away the undergrowth that's overrun it, maybe the true solution would have been in plain sight all along.

**Chris Tighe**  
*Oxford*

## Football haunting

Enjoyed Alan Murdie's sport-themed column [FT397:18-21]. However, the ghost of Arsenal's former manager Herbert Chapman was not said to haunt the Emirates Stadium (opened in 2006) but the club's former home, Highbury, located half a mile away, which has since been replaced with housing.

**Mark Graham**  
*Huddersfield, West Yorkshire*

## Cats, dogs and bears

With respect to the "black dog-equals-big-black cat" proposal [FT396:50]: I was recently looking through some old newspapers online and came across a report in *The Evening Telegraph* (18 Nov 1929), of a "black bear with red eyes and a dog's bark" roaming the woods near Buckenham Tofts, now part of the Army's Stanford Training Area in Norfolk. According to the report, the creature looked "over a hedge at two sober men driving horses", chased "two other men, equally sober, across a ploughed field" as well as "fighting, defeating, and eating one *sober* tabby cat" (my italics).

The local police searched the woods after the first sighting, which "apparently" took place in broad daylight about noon. They found no trace of the Buckenham Beast; but after the police investigation, the beast chased two

men "across a ploughed field at midnight". The men were "positive that [the beast] was a bear... because, although it growled like a dog, it was larger than any known breed of dog". The paper notes that folklorists considered the Buckenham Beast to be the infamous Black Shuck: a phantom dog long held to roam East Anglia.

As there was more than one sighting, it's difficult to dismiss the 'Buckenham bear' as a tall tale. A more prosaic explanation could be, if not a big cat, a large, feral dog: "Black dog-equals-big-black bear". In *Feral*, George Monbiot cites a comment by *FT*'s David Hambling in the *Skeptic* that "people often imagine that the creatures they see are very much bigger than they are". So, the men walking over the field at midnight may have overestimated the beast's size. Black animals may be particularly difficult to accurately size visually. And it was night. But presumably the hedge would give an indication of scale (and perhaps reveal if it was a dog, cat or bear) as the 'Buckenham Beast' peered at the men driving horses.

Monbiot speculates that we may have a mental template that evolved to allow us to recognise sabre-toothed and other big cats "once our ancestors' foremost predators... before the conscious mind can process and interpret the image". He suggests this may account for Alien Big Cat (ABC) reports: we instinctively interpret ambiguous phenomena as feline. If we get it wrong, it hardly matters. If we're right, the rapid interpretation could save our life.

*continued on page 72*

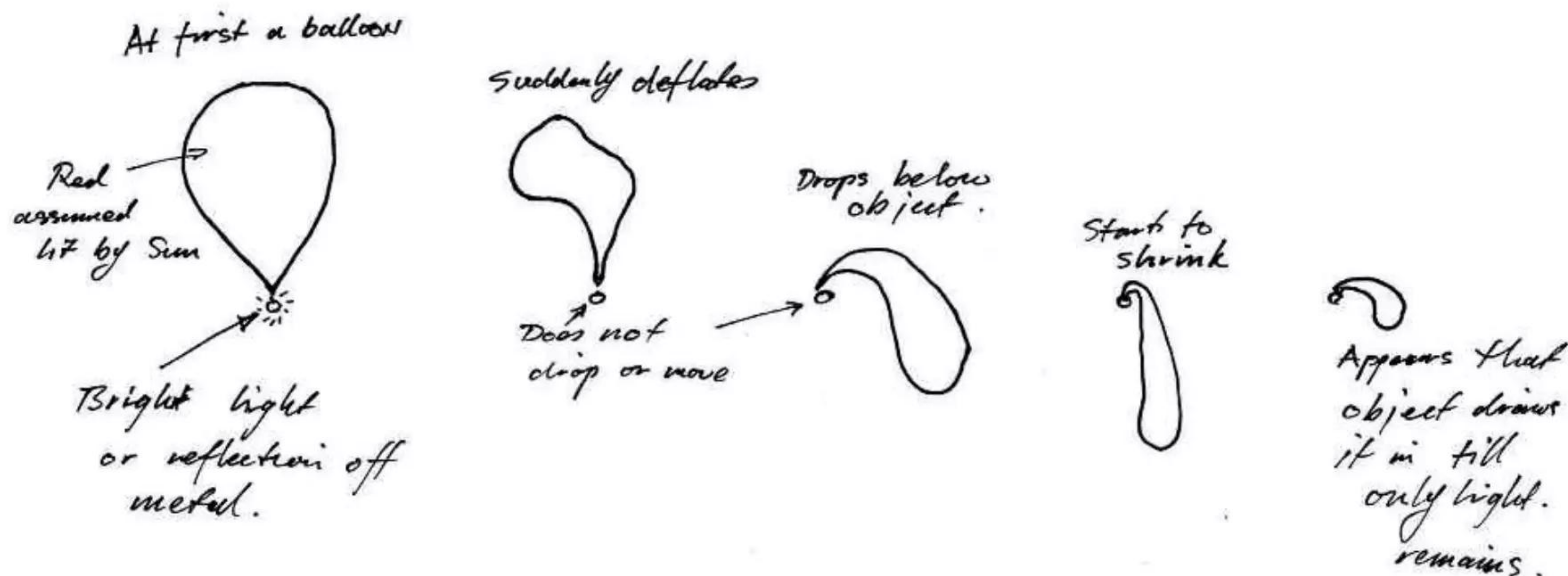


MARTIN ROSS



# IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers



## Mystery over London

As far as my memory allows, the following aerial sighting happened in the summer of 1983 or 1984, when I was working as a car mechanic for a garage in Perivale, Greenford, west London. We had a customer planning to take his car abroad. Two days before his departure, his car randomly wouldn't start. We fixed that, but then it failed to start again, diagnosed as a bad battery. Although I was not involved in the initial repair, we arranged for me to come in extra early, 6am. I would drive to his home in St Catherine's Dock and replace the battery in time for him to catch the ferry.

I started off from my home in High Wycombe about 5.30am. It was a beautiful morning with a crystal clear blue sky. I took the M40 to Uxbridge where it became the A40, known as the Western Avenue. I could see a band of cloud/smog over London, back-lit by the rising Sun turning it a brilliant orange red. There was no other cloud about. As I drove nearer I noticed a hot air balloon to the left, roughly to the north-east and at an elevation of about 10 degrees. I guessed it was over Greenford or Harrow. I thought how nice it would be to do that. At the bottom of the balloon there was a bright light, which I assumed was the reflection of the Sun on a metal part like the burner. It was still some miles away.

## "To my shock and horror, the balloon started to deflate and collapse"

To my shock and horror, the balloon started to deflate and collapse. I thought I was witnessing a terrible accident and expected it to drop out of the sky – but the light didn't move at all. The balloon part, now slack, dropped slowly down till it hung underneath the light. The light (or shining object) appeared to suck this envelope in, along with whatever it contained, till it disappeared, leaving the light only, as far as I could tell in exactly the same position. By then I was a mile or so away. There was traffic about and I looked at other drivers, but couldn't tell if they had seen it too. I reached work and the light was still there in the same place, now at an elevation of about 80 degrees to the north-east. I thought it was maybe hovering over Wembley or Neasden, but it could have been further away and at greater altitude, possibly above the atmosphere.

I duly loaded up the van I was using with the battery and my tools. Joined by another employee, I pointed out the light to him. I told him what I had seen, but he just shrugged his shoulders.

The light was small but bright and seemed slightly oval. It could have been something metallic reflecting the Sun. It was still there as I set off to docklands, but in the van that part of the sky was no longer visible. I did the job and returned to Perivale about 11.30. By then, it had gone or was no longer visible.

I have thought about it a lot and looked for an explanation, but can't find anything that fits. Was I mistaking an aircraft vapour trail, a satellite, a hovering helicopter exhaust or jump jet, an actual balloon or something else? I surmise the red colour was due to illumination by the Sun, like the band of cloud low down in the sky. Regarding the 'balloon' which started out above the object looking exactly like an envelope of gas providing buoyancy or lift, (the skin under tension and the shape of an upside down onion), then collapsing and hanging limply down to one side, this would be the opposite of lift, assuming it had weight. The oddest thing about the light was how it resolutely stayed in place, my observation lasting about 45 minutes. It could have been a small reflection on part of a larger object; there was no way to tell.

I've never reported this sighting, only ever telling a couple of friends and my wife. I've never seen anything reported about it, although it was over a densely populated area; nor have I heard of anything similar. I would love

to know if anyone else saw it or anything similar – or, best of all, could tell me what it was and what an idiot I've been.

**Mick Hennell**  
Somerset

## Dreams realised

For Christmas 1988, when I was 11 years old, my mum bought me a *Pop Hits* diary. I remember it clearly – a green and white cover featuring Kylie Minogue and other stars of the day. Like many pre-teens, I wrote feverishly for the first few weeks, but by February my scribbles were few and far between, before dying out completely. One record, however, stood out. I'd awoken one morning and grabbed the diary, while still in bed, to jot down my dream from the night before. Unlike the majority of my dreams even to this day, it had been so clear – I was throwing a rugby ball back and forth with a ginger-haired guy I didn't recognise, on the banks of the River Seine. Having no interest in rugby and never having been to France, it was so odd that I wrote down everything I could remember.

Six years later, I joined some former school friends on a trip to Paris to watch Scotland's Five Nations match at the Parc de Princes. On the morning of the game, we were sitting on the banks of the Seine with hundreds of other fans, drinking beer and praying for a first win in France since 1969. I felt a small



thump on my back and turned around to find a rugby ball. I looked up and saw a familiar looking ginger-haired chap asking me to throw his ball back.

**Lorne Grant**  
*Falkirk, Stirlingshire*

Between the ages of eight and 12, I had the same nightmare three or four times a month and would wake up in a total sweat, frightened out of my wits. I would see a vague image of a face looking at me, as if in a smokey reflection, accompanied by a swishing noise. When I looked directly at the face it smiled at me and the noise stopped, but when I looked away the face made all kinds of contorted grimaces and the swishing noise started again. Twenty years later, in 2008, I was a window cleaner. While cleaning the windows of a mental asylum, I saw a face smiling at me, but when I looked away it grimaced in the way I recalled from the nightmare. The swishing noise was there as well, made by my scrim cloth wiping the window.

**Alan —**  
*Belfast, Northern Ireland*

## Plates of shrimp

Alan Murdie recounted Mary Rose Barrington's theory of JOTTS – Just One of Those Things [FT392:20-22]. My childhood friend Jan and I (pictured below in 1979) coined an analogous term for JOTTS: "plates of shrimp". Our terminology referenced the 1984 film, *Repo Man*. In one classic scene, while feeding rubbish into a trash can fire (including the paperback, *Dioretix – The Science of Matter over Mind* by A-Rum-Bubba – simultaneously spoofing Scientology and Baba Ram Dass), Miller tells Otto:

"A lot of people don't realise what's really going on. They view life as a bunch of unconnected incidents and things. They don't realise that there's this lattice of coincidence that lies on top of everything. I'll give you an example, show you what I mean. Suppose you're thinking about a plate of shrimp. Suddenly someone will say like 'plate' or 'shrimp' or 'plate of shrimp' out of the blue, no explanation. No point in looking for it either. It's all a part of cosmic unconsciousness." A "\$2.95 plate o'shrimp luncheon special" sign on the

window of a diner can be seen in the background of a later scene. Brilliant. One could write a dissertation on all the forteen Easter eggs nestled in this movie. After watching *Repo Man*, Jan and I thereafter called psychic perceptions "plates of shrimp".

In the 1990s Jan and I were both avid second-hand shoppers. One evening when I stopped by her house, she was excited to show me her latest thrift store score. She described it only as "a cool dress" and as she led me towards her closet, I got a vivid mental image of a dress I'd bought several months previously. My dress was a 1960s (?) black cotton Mexican dress with black lace panels in the tiers of the skirt and bell sleeves – a sort of hippie bruja frock (below). As Jan plucked her newly acquired dress from her closet, I was astonished to see her holding the exact same dress that I owned and that had, moments earlier, leapt into my

mind's eye. I was so astonished, in fact, that I burst into tears from the sheer surprise of it (not my typical way of reacting). We had purchased identical vintage dresses months apart and from different thrift stores. What were the odds? But the unsettling thing for me was I somehow "knew" that the dress she was going to show me was this garment.

I got rid of my dress in a wardrobe purge years ago, but Jan kept hers as a "plate of shrimp" artefact. I'm certain that over the course of our decades-long friendship, we shared many other "plates of shrimp". And no doubt we've all had the experience of, say, hearing a new word or discovering a new concept, then suddenly references to that word or concept are seemingly everywhere. Plates of shrimp – Germans probably have a single precise word for such occurrences. But as Alan Murdie commented, a feature of JOTTS



is their inconsequential nature. Thus, these flashes of synchronicity – joyous glimpses of "the lattice of coincidence that lies on top of everything" – soon fade from memory.

**Anne Henderson**  
*Tucson, Arizona*

## Bear on the loose?

I had a fairly weird experience in early June 2020. I woke up in the early hours of the morning (about 3am), as I often do, being a fitful sleeper, and put my head out of my second floor bedroom window to get some air. I didn't turn the bedroom light on. I noticed to my satisfaction that the resident hedgehog was snuffling around crunching snails on the lawn in the back garden – my eyes adjusted to the darkness and I could see its dark shape moving around. I live in a quiet cul-de-sac [in the Vale of Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire] and each semi-detached house has its own largish patch of well maintained lawn separated by wooden fencing on each side. There are no major roads nearby and I can see woods and hills in the distance. Anyway, after a few minutes watching the hedgehog, I heard a deep sound in the distance much like the roar of a bear, which instantly set off a number of dogs in the area. I thought "What on earth was that?" and a few seconds later heard the same sound again, which again set off the dogs. I listened for some time, but didn't hear it again. The dogs didn't bark again. I am familiar with the local wildlife and have heard foxes many times over the years but this was like nothing I had ever heard before. It was possibly, at a stretch, a big cat – I live near Wendover Woods which has reportedly got big cats living there and elsewhere locally – but it seemed far too loud and deep. The other possibility was a wild boar, and I know they have been sighted in the county, but again this seemed very unlikely. As I say, it sounded much like a bear. It occurred to me that it could have been a Bigfoot, but discounted this fanciful notion at once.

All in all, it's a mystery. It certainly unnerved me and I was glad to close the window and return to bed.

**Nick Smith**  
*Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire*



# LETTERS



## Sweet UFOs

Regular readers might remember my letter about finding an “Area 51” trading card in one of my young daughter’s lunch-box fruit snack packs [FT360:75], and musing about whether this sort of thing could be a covert way for the Illuminati et al to “desensitise” children from having any fear of extraterrestrials, prior to them being “integrated”



into society. I also mentioned that I don’t remember such imagery or ideas being around when I was young in the 1970s – but there was a follow-up letter [FT365:75] about how it has indeed been going on for a long time in different ways and forms. Well, in a supermarket yesterday I suddenly recalled the humble “Flying Saucer” sweet from my childhood.

It looks as if the whole rice

paper capsule idea originated in 1900 as a way to take pharmaceutical powders, being invented by a Flemish company called Belgica. Around the early 1950s this Antwerp-based producer of communion wafers, facing a decline in demand for their product, re-invented it as the confectionery we now all know – the Flying Saucer or *Zure ouwels* in Flemish – two rice paper discs glued together and

filled with a small measure of sherbet (see [www.astrasweets.com/en/about-us/](http://www.astrasweets.com/en/about-us/)). Flying Saucers are officially registered as a traditional product of Flanders and came 12th in a 2009 poll among adults for “Britain’s top sweets”.

Here are a couple of my own “hoax” UFO photographs using one of them.

**James Watson**

*By email*



I wonder if the same applies to bears. In *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance*, Stephen Herrero notes that, apart from humans, the “grizzly bear and the polar bear are the most dangerous wild land mammals in North America.” Just as our ancestors faced massive sabretooth cats, we faced mega-bears. The extinct short-faced bear *Paracatherium pamparum*, for instance, was up to three times larger than the record for the most massive polar bear (R MacPhee, *End of the Megafauna*). So, if we have a cat template, why not one for bears?

Perhaps because ABCs are part of our culture, regularly covered in newspapers and online, our subconscious template means we interpret an ambiguous phenomenon as feline. But could the same phenomenon evoke a bear, if we evolved that template? It’s curious, at least to me, that the sober men saw a bear, rather than a hound, big cat or even Black Shuck. I doubt, however, if any single explanation will account for such a com-

plex phenomenon as out-of-place fauna.

**Mark Greener**

*By email*

## Fanzine history

I was browsing through back issues and noticed the review of Steve Moore’s *Selene* [FT387:64], which contained the misinformation that Steve’s *Orpheus* (1971) was the first UK fanzine. David A Sutton [FT389:71] pointed out that there had been fanzines back in the 1960s, while the interview with Brian Stapleford [FT389:40] mentioned that

he and Bob Rickard had both contributed to the same fanzine in the 1960s.

It is true that Steve was a key figure in the development of a separate comics fandom – in the 1960s – but before that he had been involved in the general, more inclusive, science fiction fandom – and had produced SF fanzines as early as 1964.

However, SF fandom began in the UK in the early 1930s, and had been continually putting out fanzines since the mid-1930s. The term ‘fanzine’ (fuz or zine) was coined by a US fan Louis Russell Chauvenet in the early

1940s. Before that, they had been known as amzines (amateur magazines), fanmagazines (fmz) or fanmags.

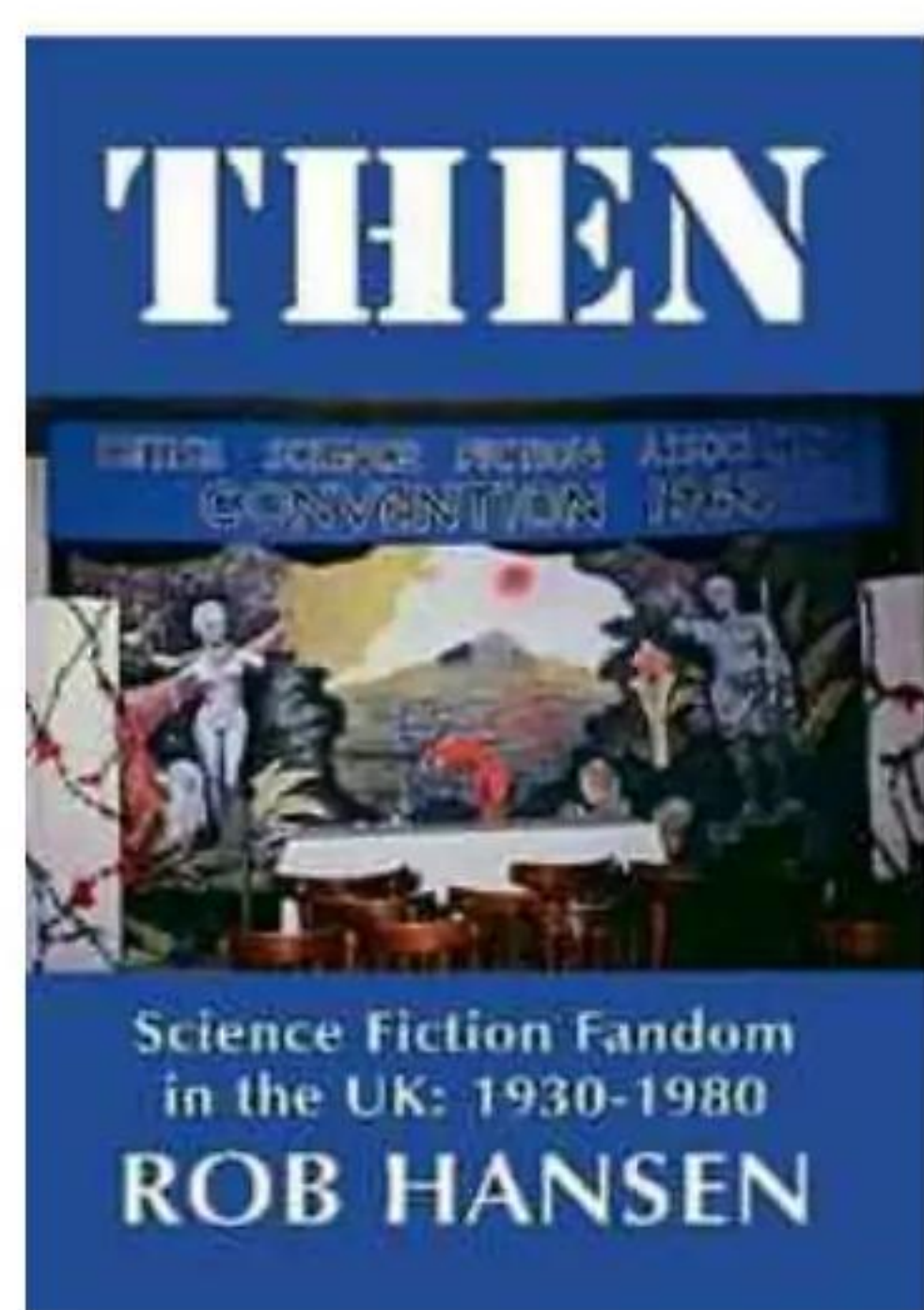
For more detail on fan history, a good source

is Rob Hansen’s *THEN – Science Fiction Fandom in the UK 1930-1980* (Ansible Editions, 2016). This was reviewed by Bob Rickard [FT358:60-61] and is greatly expanded from the original four-issue fanzine version (1987-1993), which itself has been online for many years and was a source for Bob Rickard’s ‘First Fortean’s series [FT308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 314, 315, 317, 320, 321, 323, 325.] Hansen’s own website, [fiawol.org.uk](http://fiawol.org.uk), contains lots of detail not in his book, including articles and convention reports collated from contemporary fanzines.

Harry Warner Jr’s *All Our Yesterdays* (1969) and *A Wealth of Fable* (1976, 1977, 1992) are primarily about US fandom, but also cover other countries. Other good sources include [ansible.org.uk](http://ansible.org.uk); [fanac.org](http://fanac.org); [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com). A lot of fanzines contain articles on fan history, and there are fanzines and even (pre-Covid) conventions dedicated to the subject.

**Owen Whiteoak**

*London*





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# Fortean Traveller



## 123. East Haddam, Connecticut

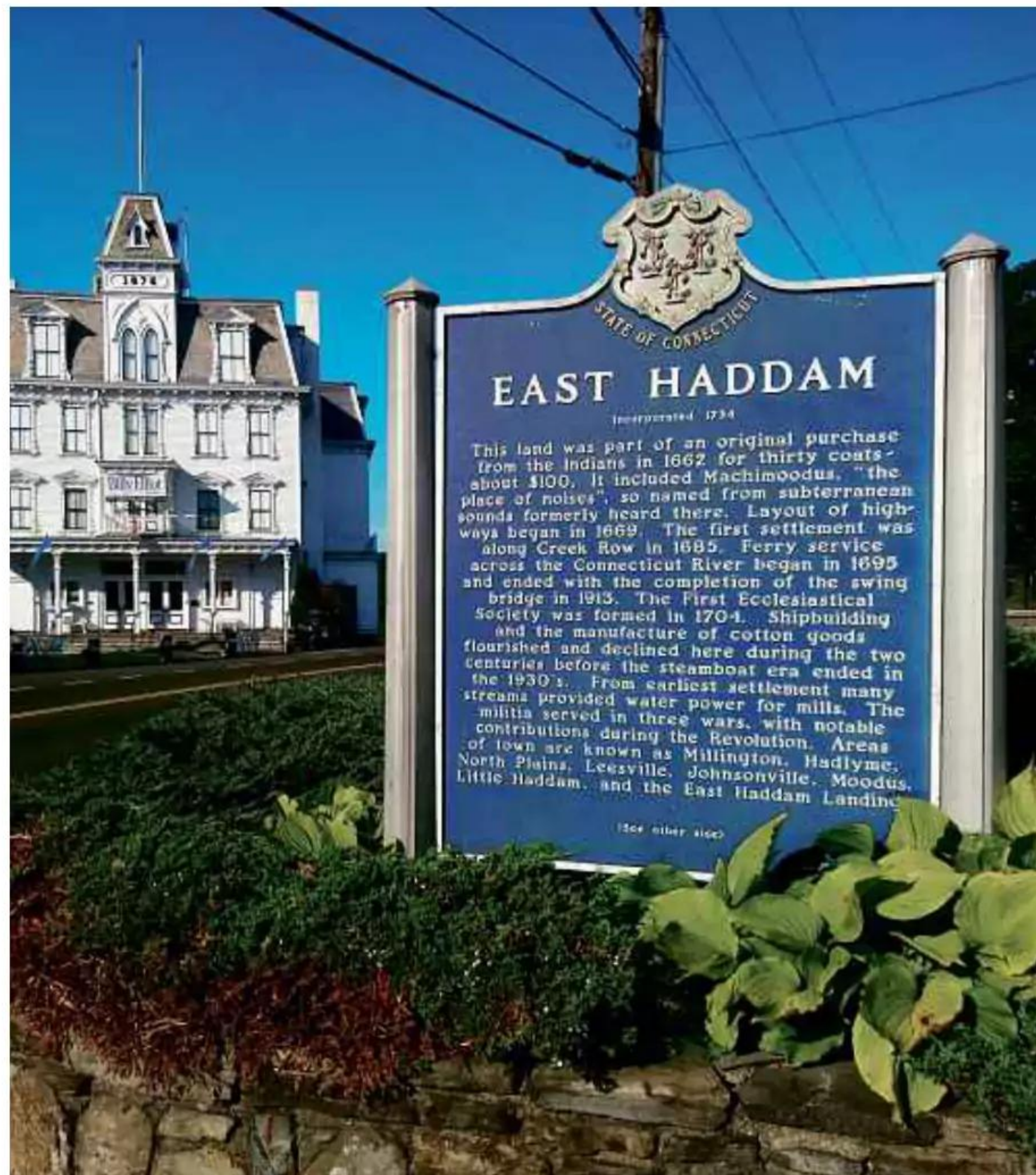
**SHARON A HILL** explores a corner of New England filled with indigenous spirits, demons, witches, monsters and things that go bump in the night...

East Haddam, Connecticut, rests at the mid-point between the urban area of Hartford to the northwest and the placid shoreline of the Long Island Sound that opens to the Atlantic. The nights are quiet and the skies are dark. From the early to mid-1900s, the nearby village of Moodus was a summer resort destination for families from the big cities. The pavilions and lodges are long gone, though the traces of foundations, roads, and game courts can be seen in Sunrise State Park. The ghosts of summers past are not the only spooky attraction of this rocky, forested area that encompasses many other small communities. The fortean traveller can hike the trails and sail the waters said to be haunted by indigenous spirits, witches, mysterious monsters and Satan himself.

### THE NOISES

Moodus is infamous for its “noises”. More precisely, the sounds are ascribed to a place called Machimoodus (“place of bad noises”) along the Salmon and Moodus Rivers, which is now a state park. White settlers who came to the area in 1685 quickly noticed the noises that were said to sound like thunder, thumps, and pistol or cannon fire. They were also historically described as cracking and popping, or like breaking or falling rocks. The noises emanate in clusters, occasionally in short succession, often active over a period of days or months. Sometimes the sound is accompanied by a shaking of the ground that is felt (and heard) in only a limited area around the Machimoodus hill of Mt Tom.

Popular information about the Moodus noises says that the legend of the sounds was related by the indigenous



**TOP:** East Haddam features an opera house near the Connecticut River's edge. The town sign mentions the Moodus Noises as “formerly” heard there, though they may return any day. **ABOVE:** The Trails of Machimoodus. This was a seasonal gathering area for the Algonquian tribes of indigenous Americans.

people of the Algonquian tribes to the curious colonists. The English story says the giant stone spirit (“manitou”) called Hobomock (or variations thereof) was said to be angry at the coming of the white strangers and their Christian God. Hobomock frequented this place they called Machit-moodus and communicated to the people via the noises.

As is typical with folklore, the stories vary and change with the popular beliefs of the times. Stephen Gencarella (TheTalesTheyTell.com), a folklorist who lives near Machimoodus and has extensively researched the historical accounts, asserts that the tale of the noises at Moodus may be the most important piece of folklore in all of New England. It epitomised the relationship between the natives and the early American settlers. Gencarella provides a guided tour through Machimoodus to the top of Mt Tom in which he describes how the legend took weird twists and turns, resurfacing in cycles, reflecting the notions of the times and also the periodic return of the





noises themselves. He says the most popular sources get the real story wrong: the noises are not messages from the evil Hobomock to the frightened and superstitious natives. That was an oversimplification of the native beliefs. The colonists, however, equated Hobomock with the Christian Devil. Throughout history, Christian colonists have demonised indigenous cultures and made the people out to be “savages” in order to justify usurping their land and eliminating them when necessary.

In the next cycle of the Moodus myth, in the mid 1700s, a colourful alchemist/wizard enters the picture. A letter to the *Connecticut Gazette* tells the tale of a learned European man named Dr Steal (later written as “Steele”). In a tale typical of folklore, Dr Steele may have been sent by King George III around 1760, and then holed up in a cabin or blacksmith’s shop to work his science or magic on the problem of the noises. In various versions of the story, Steele supposedly extracted one or more large, glowing red (or white) carbuncles (magic gems or stones) from the river shallows or a nearby cave. The alchemist said these stones were the source of the trouble and that from that point the noises would cease; but he also said that any smaller stones that remained would grow, and, in time, the noises would return. As with other tales of a special visitor stealing a magical treasure, Steele made off with

## *Dr Steele may have holed up in a cabin to work his magic on the problem of the noises*

the stone(s) on a ship that later sank.

The Moodus legend took another turn in the late 1800s, corresponding with the contemporary popularity of “witch lore”. Now, the noises were said to be coming from *inside* Mt Tom, a 300ft- (90m) tall hill of schist and granite bedrock. The “mountain” is said to be hollow and an abode of a demon/god/spirit and his witches. The entity

sits on a jewelled throne in the cavern, lighted by a great carbuncle. Black and white witches battling for favour made booming noises. Or, alternatively, the noises were caused by the Great One when he got tired of the fighting and blew the witches out of the mountain. The version of this tale published by the *New York Sun* in 1887 replaces Hobomock with “Machimoodi”, the lord of the witches.

Finally, the creative evolution of the Moodus noises became folded into the rise of Satanic fears and media hype of the 1960s. The various evil beings are simplified into Satan himself. The “Some people say...” stories then dispense with Hobomock or Machimoodi altogether, and just give the Devil credit for the noises.

## **CAVERNS AND QUAKES**

Across the road, a short way from the entrance to Machimoodus park, along a small ridge called Cave Hill, is an opening in the rocks called the Cave of the Winds, or the Moodus Cave. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the local scoop was that the Moodus noises were at their loudest in this area and possibly came from the cave. A geologist will quickly recognise that the “cave” was created from the juxtaposition of rock



**TOP:** Display featuring the Moodus noises at the Connecticut River Museum's special exhibit of local myths and legends.

**ABOVE:** The author at the Moodus Cave of the Winds at Cave Hill. Shaped like a funnel into the rock, the opening extends only about 40ft (12m) before it closes up.



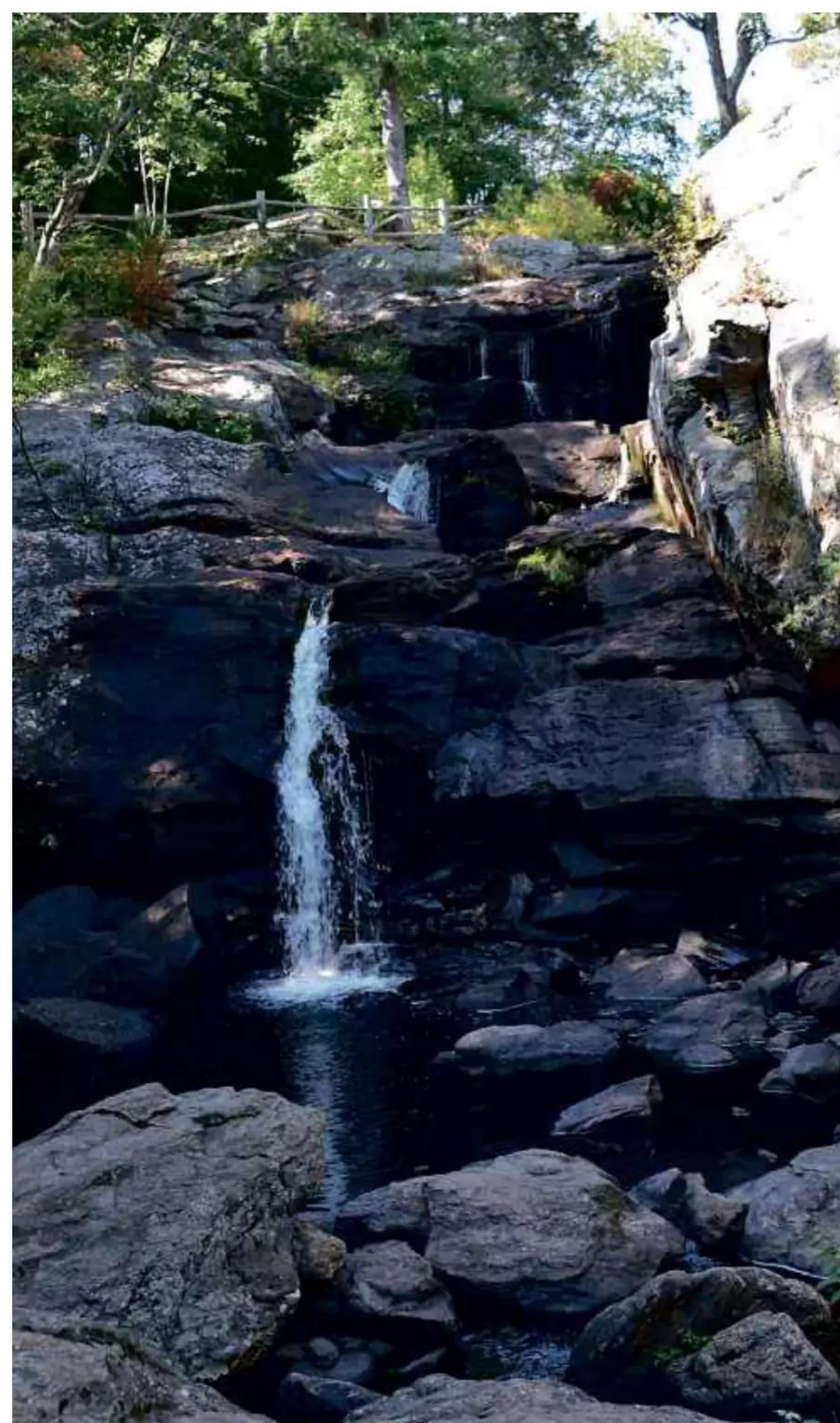
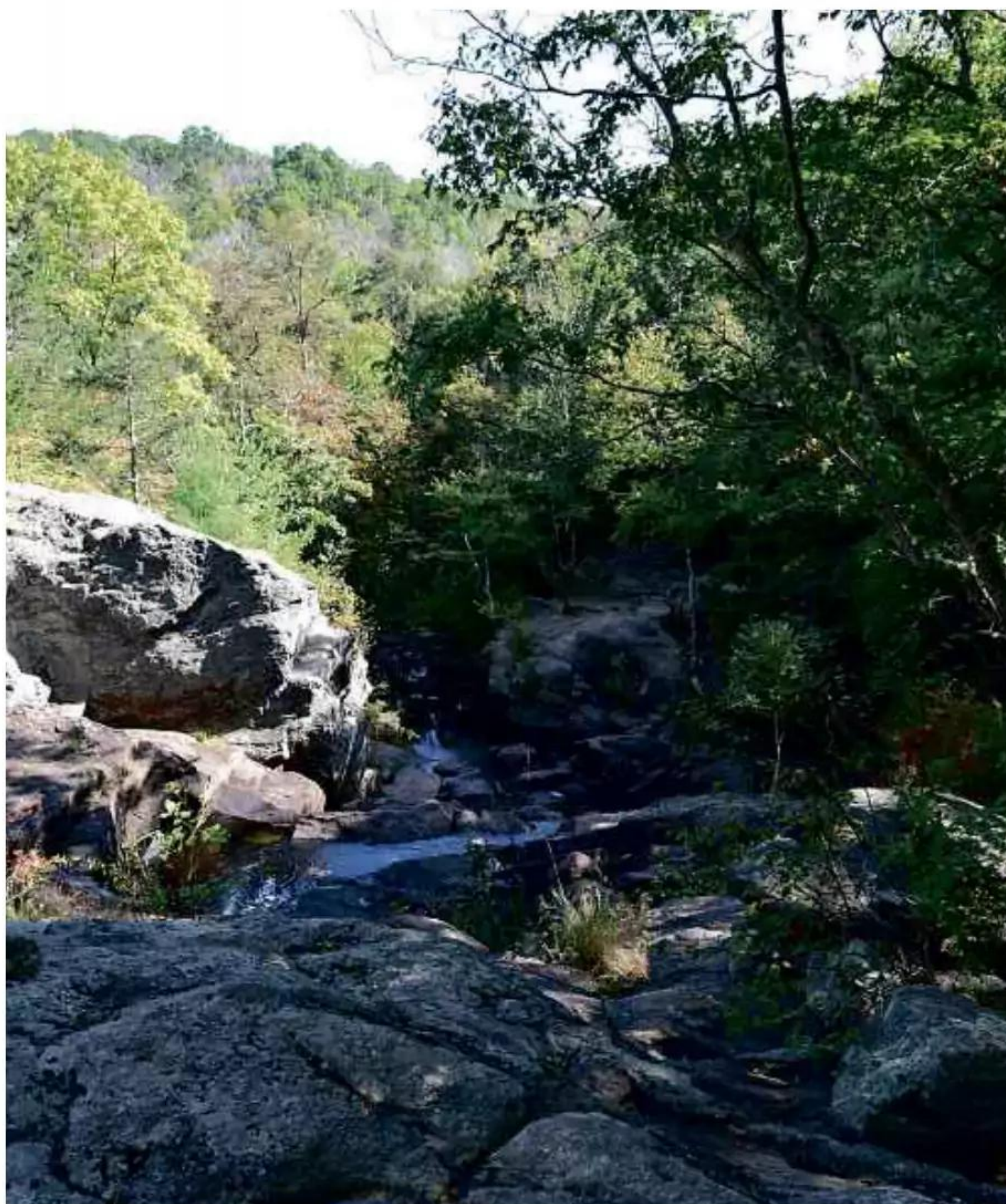
slabs and boulders as a result of glacial activity: the space is more accurately termed a void, as it is not a true karst cave. Stories were told that the native sachems would meet here. Exaggerated descriptions of the cave suggest it does not end about 40ft (12m) in, where it narrows and (definitively) closes, but that a small opening, now sealed, led to a bigger cavern beyond, with a flowing river in the cavern below. The cave became associated with the cause of the noises, but it has nothing geologically to do with them. Cave Hill is on the property of the privately owned Cave Hill Resort. Permission is required to access it.

The idea of a cavern under Mt Tom became conflated with the Cave Hill void. Notice the common ideas of “wind” carrying away the fighting witches and the name of the cave. Gencarella notes that many people insist that another cave opening (uncovered by the legendary Dr Steele) still exists somewhere on Mt Tom. Regardless of what Internet sites say, don’t look for the witches’ cave on the trail to Mt Tom in Machimoodus. It exists only in legend.

The cause of the Moodus noises was long suspected to be shallow earthquakes. This was finally confirmed by an extensive study conducted by the Weston Observatory of Boston College in the 1970s through the use of highly sensitive seismographs (recording magnitude 0 quakes or lower). Reports of noises correlated exactly with the recorded events, which were too tiny and localised to be picked up by a regional seismic monitoring network. The shallowness of the quakes means that some of the energy can reach the surface, where it is converted into low-frequency audible sound waves. Rarely, larger quakes occur in New England that cause minor damage.

### THE DEVIL’S HOPYARD

Silent years pass in Moodus between episodes of quakes and noises. The last was in 2015. There were none on the few days that I visited. (I was listening carefully.) The cause of the unusual seismicity in this discrete area is still unclear. Newcomers who don’t know about the Moodus noises



TOP: Boulders and bedrock at the Devil’s Hopyard have potholes that were said to be witches’ cauldrons. ABOVE: Satan was said to sit at the top of Chapman Falls and watch his witches do their magic below.

tend to assume the booms are explosions or distant thunder.

In 1896, Charles Skinner memorialised the sinister legend of Machimoodus in *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*. HP Lovecraft seems to have read this, coming across Skinner’s description of the nearby witches’ hangout, the Devil’s Hopyard. The Hopyard is mentioned by name, and strange Earth noises featured, in *The Dunwich Horror* (1929). The Hopyard is a Connecticut state park with some challenging, steep rocky trails. The highlight of the park is the 60ft- (18m) tall Chapman Falls on the Eightmile River. During low flow, potholes are visible in the bedrock. Derived from glacial action, in local folklore, the holes became witches’ cauldrons. The Devil would sit atop the falls and watch his minions brew up their poisons and spells. Similar potholes around the world are also seen as the traces of Satan or giants. Moshup, a Wampanoag entity, features in landscape-related legends all across New England, including those around East Haddam. Many more landmarks in Connecticut carry the name of “Devil” with associated folklore that derived originally from indigenous legends and was twisted by the colonists. If you are an adept and adventurous climber, you can scale the near-vertical rock slope path to the Devil’s Oven in the Hopyard – another small opening in the rock. Also mentioned by Skinner were the “witch” meadows, woods, and swamps of the state. Consequently, the colourful names continue to spark new stories and excuses for modern legend tripping. The Hopyard is associated with contemporary tales of apparitions, shadows, orbs, and unnerving episodes related by park visitors.

### SIDE TRIPS

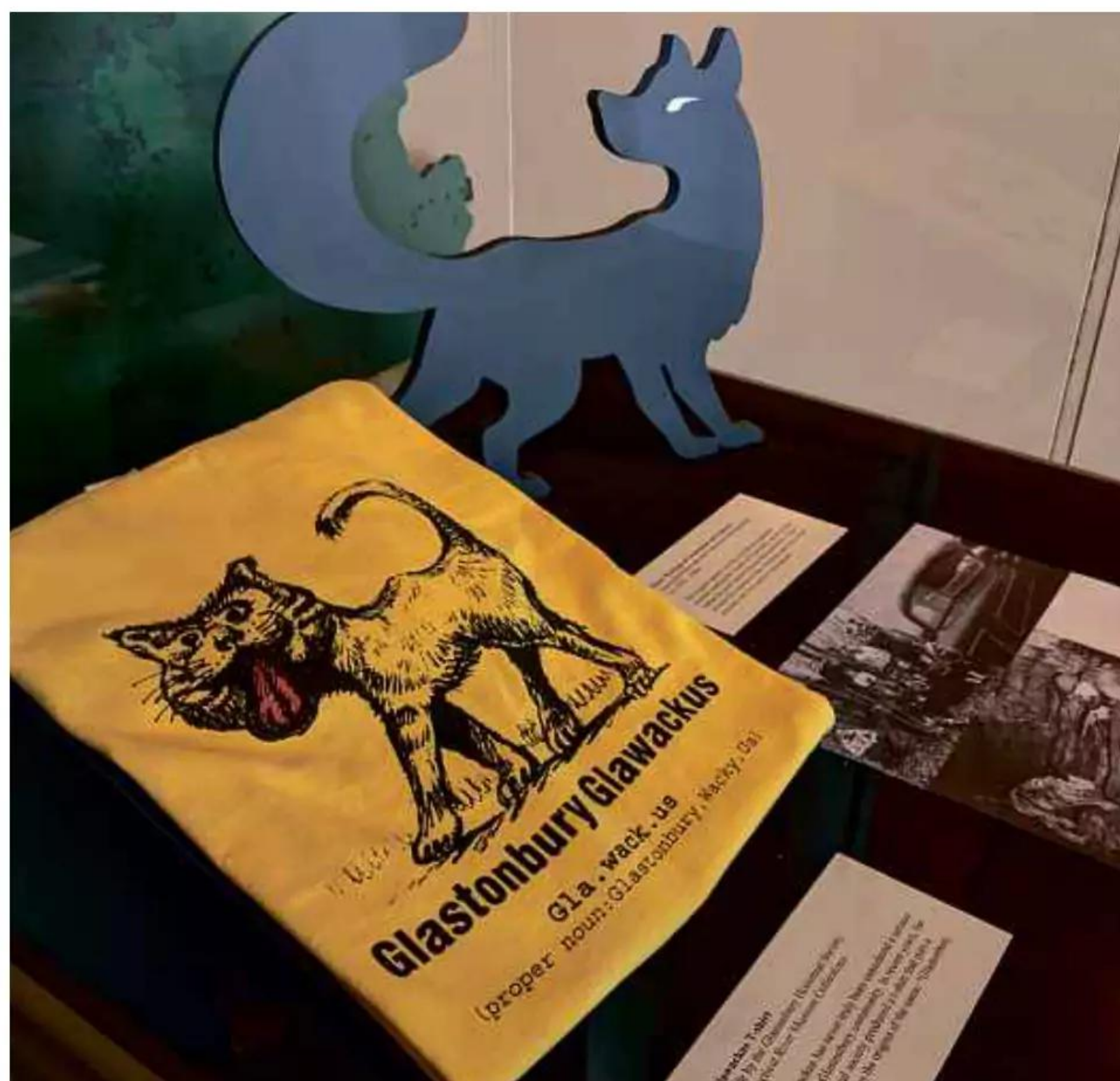
While traversing the East Haddam trails near the Salmon River, keep an eye out for a striking black fox that will lead you from the path to certain death. Large and mysterious cats also abide in the Connecticut woods. The most famous is the Glawauckus that terrorised Glastonbury in 1939. Originally described as a huge cat, its brief appearance allowed it to subsequently morph into various shapes





in the popular culture of subsequent decades. The most reasonable explanation was that Glastonbury experienced a visit from a raucous fisher (or fisher cat as it's also known) – an animal nearly eliminated in the region due to fur trapping. The weasel-like creature has a fearsome scream that will rip through the peaceful Connecticut woodlands. As happens in several eastern US states, mountain lion (puma, cougar) sightings are often reported, even though the native population was extirpated in these areas a century ago. It is not out of the question that roaming males may be returning. In 2011, a young male cougar was killed on a roadway near Greenwich, Connecticut. Genetic testing showed he was related to cats in South Dakota.

The adjacent Connecticut River carries its own beast legends as it winds down to the sea (where, just a short sail away, in the Sound, is Plum Island with its controversial animal disease research lab). Connie, the river serpent, was recently featured in the 'River Myths and Legends' exhibit at the Connecticut River Museum in Essex. Connie made the news in 1886 when she upended a three-man boat. The victims described the creature as over 100ft (30m) long. The story itself didn't hold water and subsequent sightings of Connie



were rare indeed. But, as with other local water monsters, the legend of Connie is embraced by the river communities.

There is no shortage of interesting additional side trips around East Haddam. The former ghost town of Johnsonville is near Machimoodus and can be seen from Mt Tom. Once the centre of local twine production, the ownership of the town changed hands, it fell on hard times and was eventually abandoned. Some say the ghost of a previous owner roams the grounds. The

land was recently purchased by a Philippine-based Christian organisation, Iglesia Ni Cristo, who hold that they are the true Church established by Jesus Christ in the first century. The area is now posted as private.

One could also look for the elusive Seldon Cove lotus in nearby Lyme; this Egyptian flower is said to bloom every 25 years in a cove off the Connecticut River.

Alternatively, you could pay a visit to the eclectic Gillette Castle. Under construction from 1914 to 1924, this is a private

**ABOVE:** Connecticut River near Essex. The local river monster, Connie, is very rarely sighted **INSET:** An account of the water monster attack in the Connecticut River from the *Buffalo Weekly Express*, 1886. **LEFT:** Glawackus and black fox display at the Connecticut River Museum Myths and Legends exhibit.

historic stone mansion now run by the state park system. William Gillette, a so-called creative genius, oversaw the construction and added unique and eccentric features to the structure and grounds.

Fascinating and wondrous features await the visitor to East Haddam and surrounding areas who is interested in natural history and folklore; it would take an extended vacation to explore the myriad secrets and legends jam-packed into every acre of this small but spooky part of Connecticut.

**Acknowledgements:** Effusive appreciation goes out to **Stephen Gencarella of UMass-Amherst and the Connecticut River Museum in Essex, CT** for preserving and celebrating the unique tales of this area.

Sharon A Hill is the author of *Scientifical Americans: The Culture of Amateur Paranormal Researchers*. Read more about the geology of Moodus at [spookygeology.com](http://spookygeology.com).



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**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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# PHENOMENOMIX THE GROGOCH

HUNT EMERSON

FROM KINTYRE IN SCOTLAND, IN THE FAR DISTANT PAST... BEFORE THE SAINTS AND HIGH KINGS... BEFORE THE TUATHA DE DANANN... THE GROGOCH FOLK SET SAIL!



AWA' WI' YE!!  
G'WAN-SCRAM!  
AND DIN'NA COME BACK!

AWA'N BILE YER HEED!

THEIR DESTINATION - IRELAND!

IS THIS IT?  
AYE, THIS IS IT...  
WHERE ARE WE GOING TO LIVE?  
IS THERE A CHIPPER?



THESE LEANING ROCKS LOOK COZY!

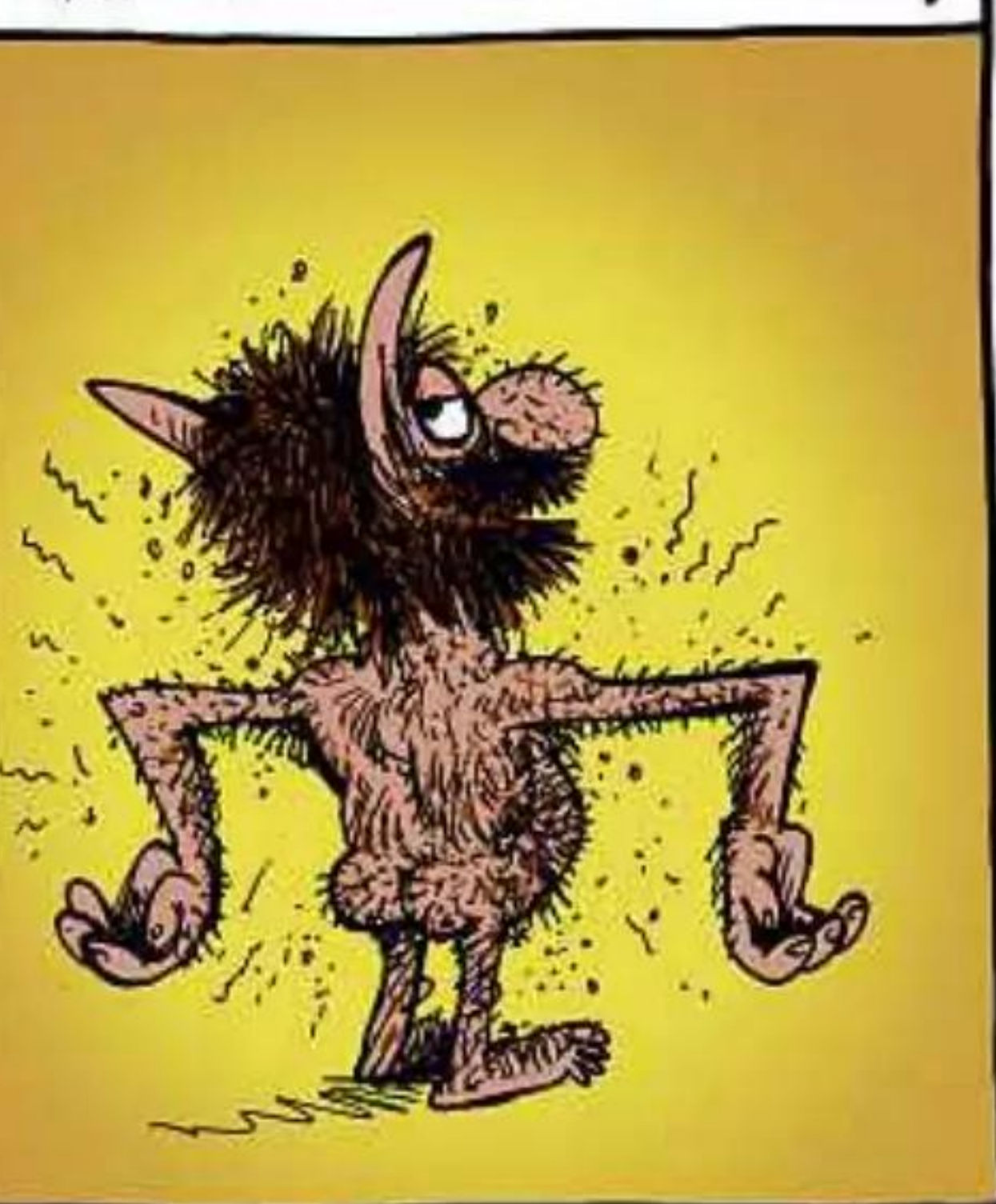
OH, AYE! THAT'LL DO FINE!



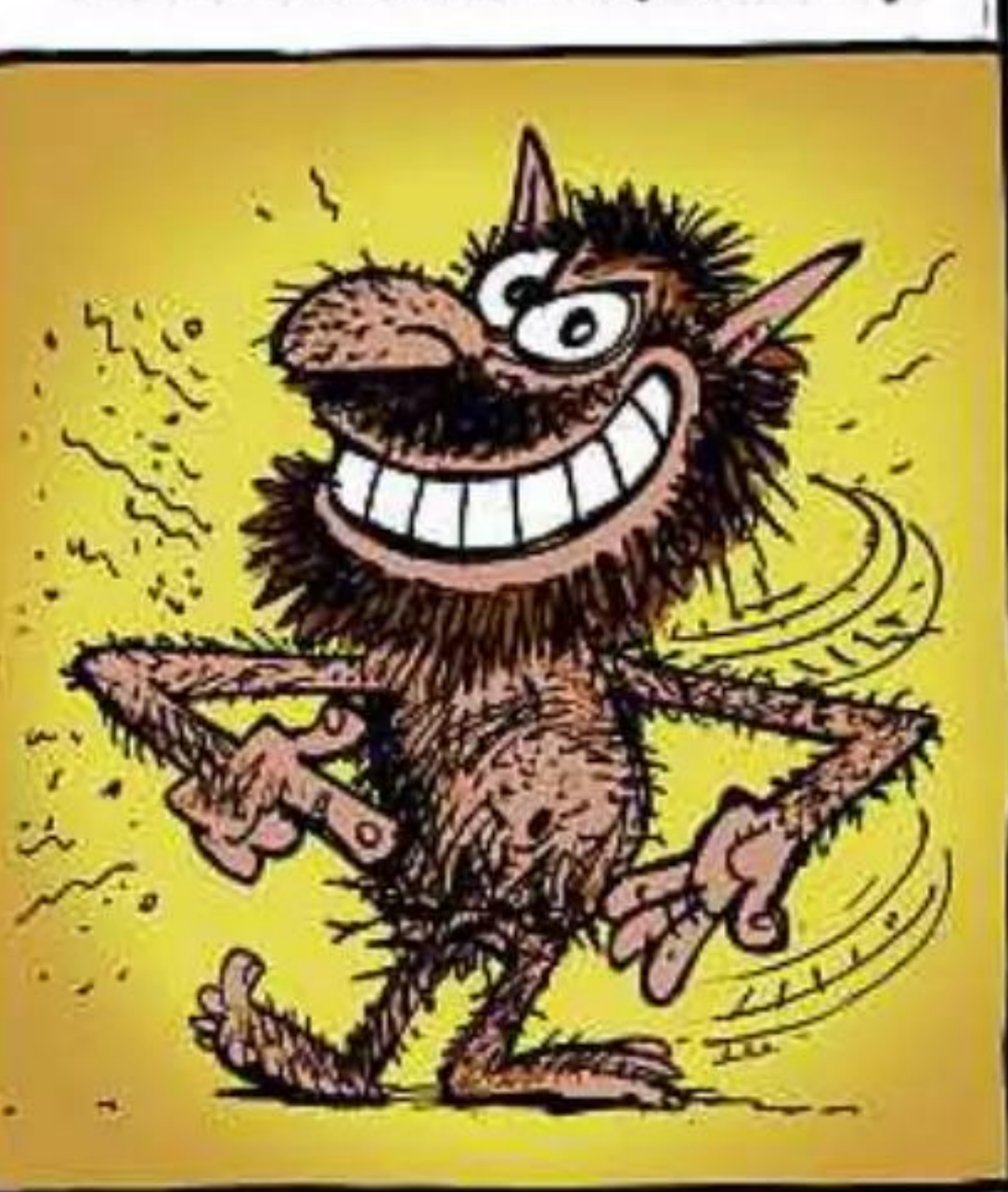
THE GROGOCH ARE EASILY SATISFIED!

AND SO THE GROGOCH SETTLED IN ANTRIM, RATHLIN ISLAND, AND DONEGAL! SOME WENT ON TO THE ISLE OF MAN, WHERE THEY CHANGED THEIR NAME TO PHYNN-ODD-EREE! WHO KNOWS WHY?

THEY ARE SMALL AND HAIRY, AND THEY WEAR NO CLOTHES!



BUT DON'T PANIC! THEY SPORT A VARIETY OF TWIGS AND DIRT THAT CONCEAL THE EMBARRASSING BITS!



PERSONAL HYGIENE IS UNKNOWN TO THEM... THEY CAN MAKE THEMSELVES INVISIBLE, BUT YOU STILL KNOW WHEN ONE IS IN THE ROOM...



AND THERE ARE NEVER ANY LADY GROGOCHS AROUND...



BUT, A GROGOCH IS AN AMIABLE LITTLE FELLOW! HE MAY BECOME ATTACHED TO A PERSON, AND HELP OUT WITH HARVEST, OR WITH DOMESTIC CHORES...



AND ALL HE ASKS IN RETURN IS A JUG OF CREAM...



BUT, IN FACT, A GROGOCH IN THE HOUSE CAN BE A BIT OF A BLOOMIN' NUISANCE!



LIKE ALL THE OLD ONES, THE ONE THING A GROGOCH CAN'T ABIDE IS A CLERGY-MAN IN THE HOUSE...

SO IF YOUR GROGOCH IS BECOMING A PAIN IN THE BUM, ASK YOUR PARISH PRIEST TO TEA...



HOLY MOTHER OF GOD!

AAAGH!!



...AND THE WEE FELLOW WILL BE OFF, TO TORMENT SOMEONE ELSE!





# COMING NEXT MONTH



## IT HAPPENED TO ME!

CELEBRATING 47 YEARS OF FT'S  
WEIRDEST WITNESS ACCOUNTS



## FLAPPING PHANTOM

FRANCIS BACON AND THE  
FROZEN CHICKEN GHOST



DUPPY LIZARD,  
HEROIC RATS,  
GHOSTLY PIGS  
AND MUCH MORE...

# FORTEAN TIMES 400

ON SALE 3 DEC 2020

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A man is thought to have fallen to his death as he tried to escape from a flat in which he was locked. Monty Chitta, 53, is believed to have slipped while trying to climb through a skylight. His body was found in the Luton flat on Christmas Day 2019, covered by a duvet and with his head on a pillow. A coroner's report found he had suffered injuries consistent with a fall from height, including fractures of the skull, ribs and pelvis. There was no indication that he had been murdered. The report stated that Mr Chitta had visited shops and a pub that night, and had most likely gone with two other men to the empty flat to continue drinking. The inquest heard he called a taxi for the other two men, who activated a door bolt when they left, leaving him trapped inside. Evidence showed he had made unanswered phone calls during his attempts to escape. Police have been unable to trace the other men, or the person who placed Mr Chitta under the duvet. *BBC News, 27 Aug 2020.*

An Indian man has been arrested on suspicion of murdering his wife, together with a snake charmer accomplice. Sooraj Kumar, 27, from the Kollam district in Kerala state, is accused of buying a highly venomous Russell's viper from a local snake charmer, Suresh. He is said to have induced the viper to bite his 25-year-old wife Uthra on 2 March 2020. Hospitalised for seven weeks, she was discharged at the end of April and was recovering at her parents' house. Kumar then purchased a cobra from Suresh, throwing it at his wife while she was asleep in bed. The next morning she was found unconscious, and despite medical treatment, she died on 7 May. The 152cm (60in) snake was found in her room and was beaten to death by neighbours. Indian cobras and Russell's vipers are among the four most dangerous snakes in South Asia, the cobra being responsible for around 15,000 deaths per year. The Russell's viper causes more deaths in India than any other snake, with an estimated 25,000 annual fatalities. It is known as an irritable, short-tempered, and very aggressive snake which coils tightly, hisses, and strikes with lightning speed.

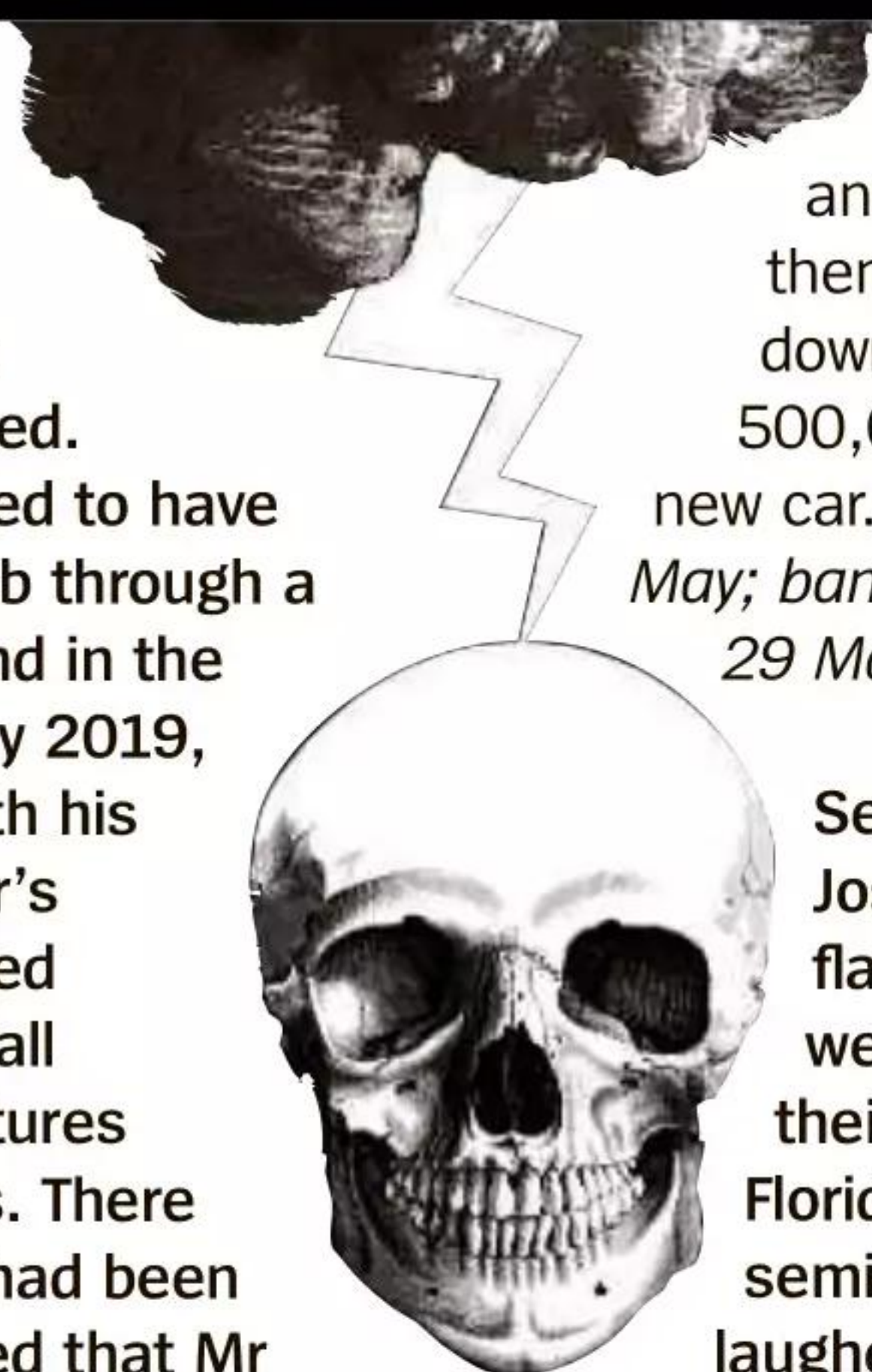
Phone records established that Kumar had been in contact with serpent handlers, and police also found he had been watching snake videos on the Internet. They believe he wished to divorce his wife

and remarry, but feared he would then have to repay a substantial dowry of nearly 100 gold coins, 500,000 rupees (£5,400) and a new car. *Times, 26 May; D.Mail, 26 May; bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com, 29 May 2020.*

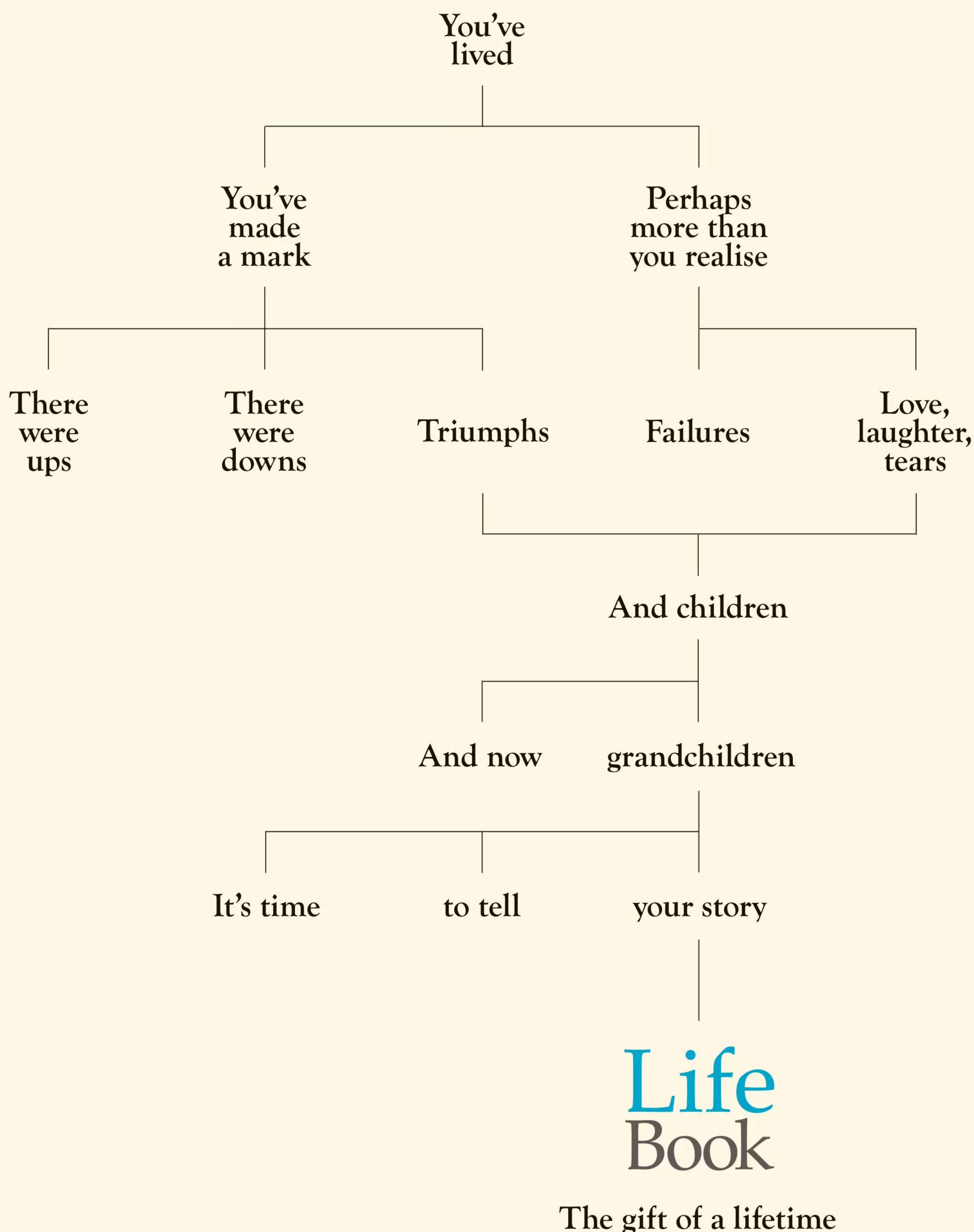
Seasonal construction workers Jose Chacon, 39, and his flatmate Alfonso Rodriguez, 41, were heard arguing at 7.30am by their neighbours in Palm Beach, Florida. Chacon had pointed his .38 semi-automatic at Rodriguez, who laughed when it failed to discharge, saying: "Shoot me... your gun does not work." Chacon then fired once, striking his victim in the upper left chest and killing him. Chacon, who allegedly pointed his gun at two other residents, pulling the trigger several times but without it firing, pleaded guilty to manslaughter and three counts of aggravated assault and was sentenced to eight years imprisonment. *Palm Beach Post, 16 May 2017.*

Coffee roaster Simon Theaker, 44, was mowing the lawn of his family's farm at Cusop, Herefordshire, when he fell down a 10ft (3m) bank, his ride-on mower landing on top of him. Walking in the garden three hours later, his fiancée found him lying dead, trapped face-down in the river. Mr Theaker ran the Black Mountain Roast coffee roastery there; his parents, describing his death as a "tragic accident", added: "Simon will rest in his favourite place on the farm". *Sun, 28 May 2020.*

A 16-year-old Thai schoolgirl died after being electrocuted by her earphones. She had been listening to music on her mobile phone while doing homework; the phone was plugged in and charging at the time. Her father, who had recently been made redundant due to the coronavirus pandemic, said she had returned from school and, as usual, went to her room to complete her homework. When she didn't emerge for some time, he went to check on her and found her slumped over her books with a burn mark on her neck. He tried CPR without success and then took her to hospital where medics were unable to revive her. The 39-year-old father, who had split up from the teen's mother when she was two, had used his redundancy pay to return to his own parents' home so he could help till their fields and look after his daughter. *forum.thaivisa.com, 14 Sept 2020.*







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# HORROR CULTURE

